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DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY

1934

NOV. 10

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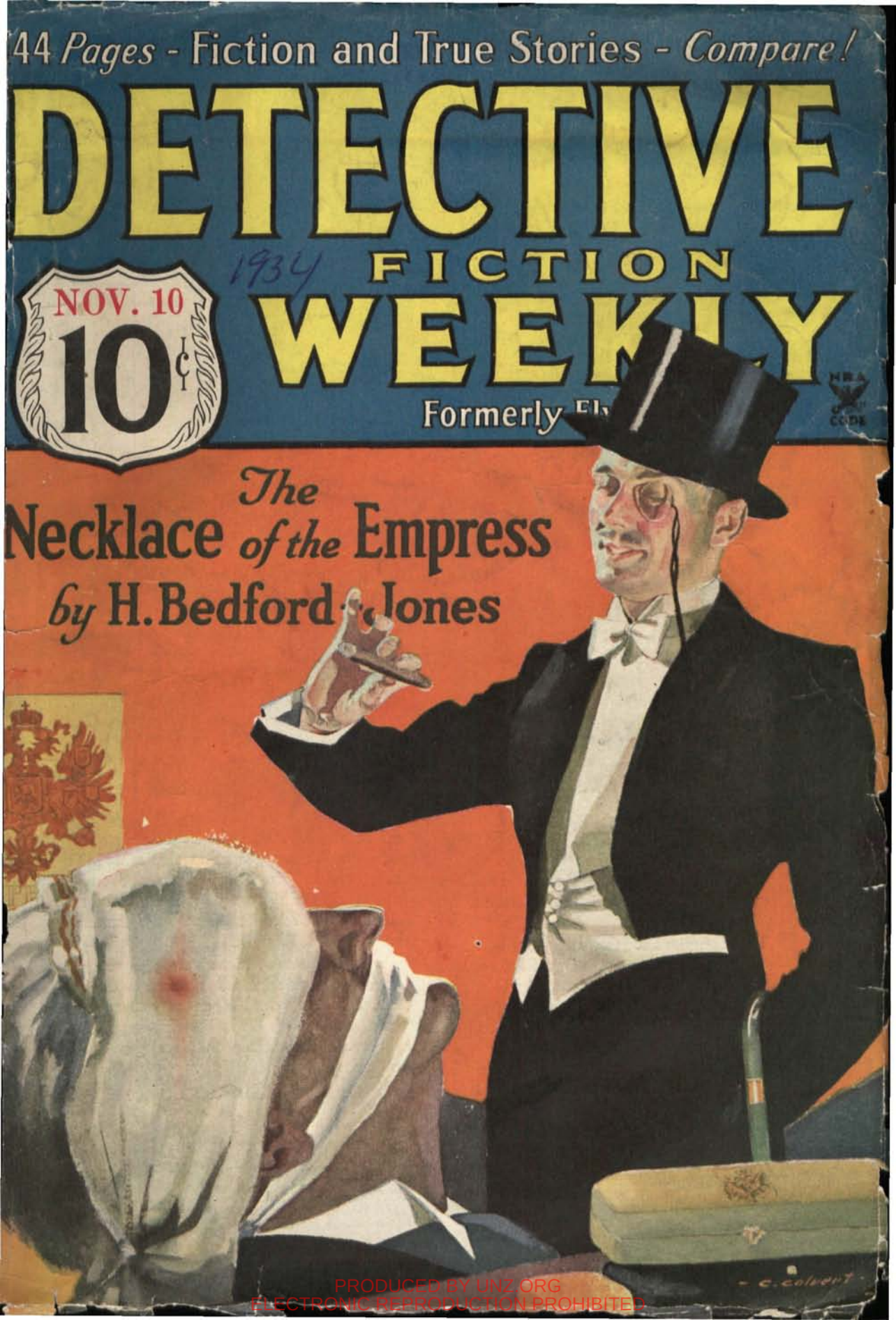
The Necklace *of the* Empress

by H. Bedford-Jones



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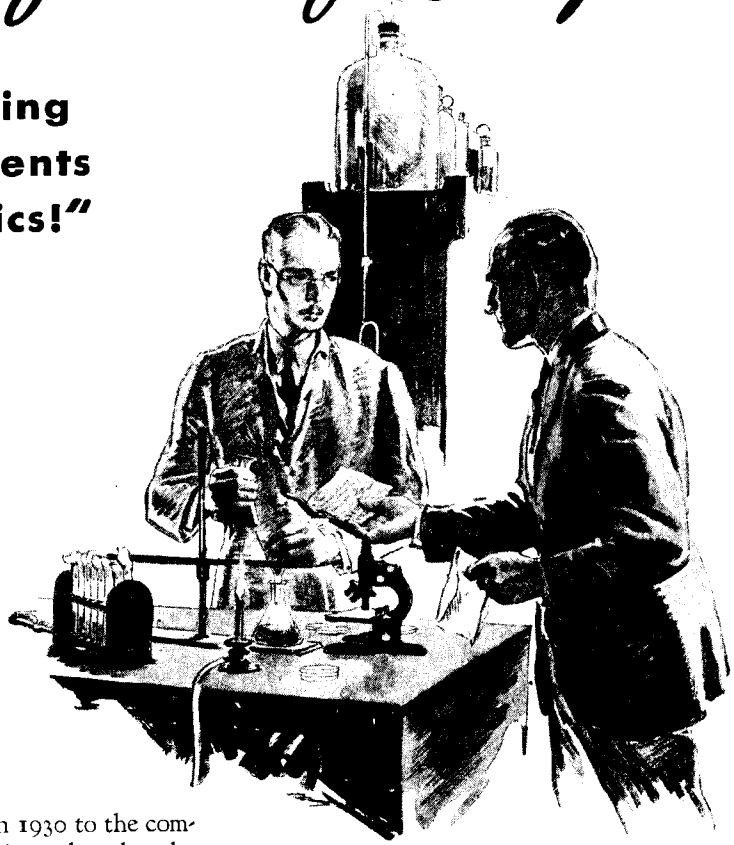

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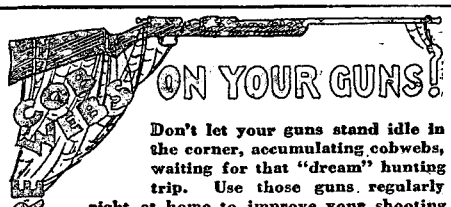

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"The Magazine With the Detective Shield on the Cover"

VOLUME LXXXIX — *Saturday, November 10, 1934* — NUMBER 1

NOVELETTES AND SHORT STORIES

The Necklace of the Empress (Novelette) . H. Bedford-Jones 4
Riley Dillon Was a Skillful Collector—of Other Men's Jewels

No Reward (Novelette) . . . . Richard Howells Watkins 38
Around the Anchored Yacht Swarmed a Fleet to Snatch $2,000,000 in Gold

Too Dumb to Be Fooled . . . . . Robert Arthur 98
The Riddle of the Footprint on the Side of a Dead Man's House

Peters . . . . . Thomas Topham 110
A Hundred Grand Double-cross Behind Jail Bars

Clue of the Bandit's Beard . . . . Edward Parrish Ware 120
Battle McKim Solves a Murder by the Clue of the Burning Beard

The Manacled Man . . . . . K. H. Lunsford 130
A Knock in the Night Carried Drama and Mystery to Hormack's Door

SERIAL

False-Face (Five Parts—2) . . . . . Fred MacIsaac 76
Andy Adams Seizes $450,000—and Can Be Charged with Murder

TRUE STORIES

Suicide Sal . . . . . Howard McLellan 23
Bonnie Parker—the Cigar Smoking Murderess Who Terrified Texas

Illustrated Crimes . . . . . Paul Berdanier 74
A "Model Servant's" Crime

FEATURES AND FACTS

Flashes From Readers 138

Your Face Reveals Your Character . . William E. Benton 140

The Soldier's Face of O'Ryan . . . . William E. Benton 141

Solving Cipher Secrets . . . . . M. E. Ohaver 142

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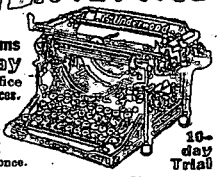

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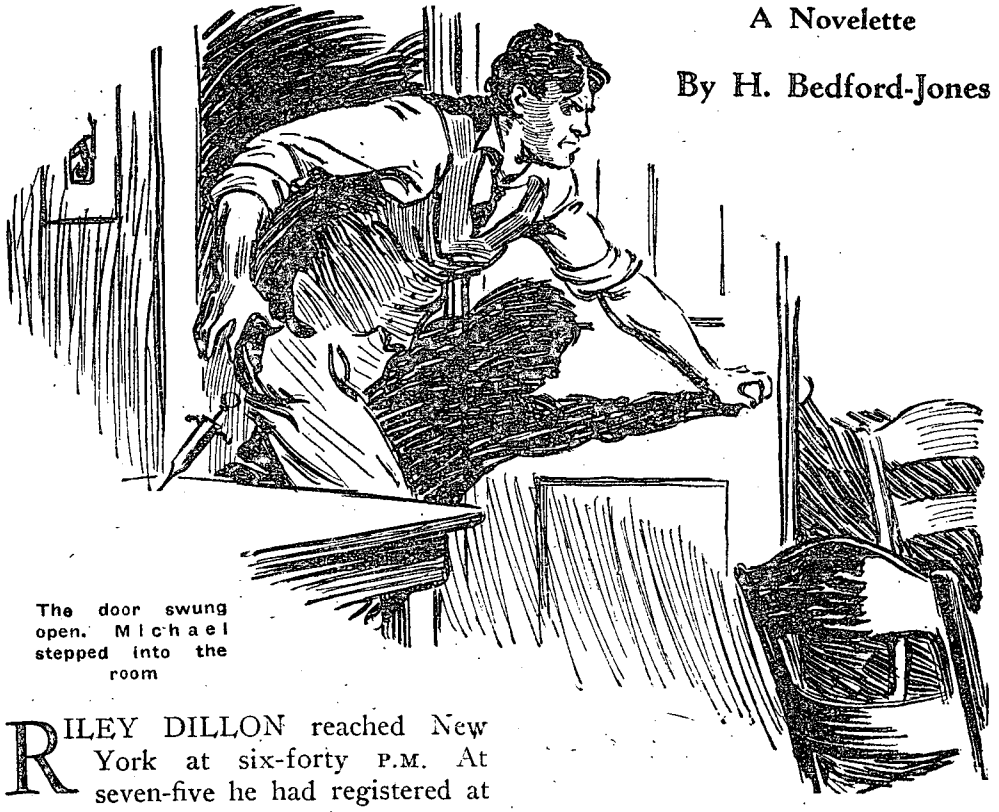
The Necklace of the Empress

A Novelette

By H. Bedford-Jones



The door swung open. Michael stepped into the room

RILEY DILLON reached New York at six-forty P.M. At seven-five he had registered at the Waldorf and secured a room to suit his rather exacting taste. At seven-thirty occurred the first of the singular incidents in the case of the scarab necklace.

Purely from self-preservation, Riley Dillon was accustomed to note and take advantage of trifles. After a rapid but fastidious change of clothes, he was putting away his things when he heard the telephone in the adjoining room ring faintly but persistently. It was obvious that the next room was occupied, but was momentarily empty. Or so it seemed.

Dillon turned to the mirror. His evening attire was impeccable. About his neck was a black silk cord from which depended a monocle in a gold rim. He surveyed himself with critical satisfaction and turned to his room door. A glance aat his wrist-watch showed it to be exactly seven-thirty.

He threw open the door and stepped out into the hall. Then he halted at thought of his room key. He had left it inside.

At this instant a woman stepped from the adjoining room. The door clicked shut behind her. She glimpsed Riley Dillon, in his own doorway, and her face went white; a face whose sheer loveliness made his pulses leap. An evening gown, a wrap, a scarf over her head.

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The Pearls of Russia Were in That Dark Room—and So Was Death. And Only One Man Dared to Gamble — Riley Dillon, Collector—of Other Men's Jewels

Dillon lowered the limp figure to the floor, then straightened up, helpless, gasping

Suddenly she turned. To Dillon's utter amazement, she spoke to him in a perfectly casual manner, yet her voice was lifted rather loudly.

"Well why don't you come? Have you forgotten something?"

"The room key, of course." Dillon fumbled in a pocket. His wits were spurred by the frantic urge in her face. He heard a heavy tread somewhere in the hall. "I can't find the confounded thing. Didn't you take it from the bellboy?"

"No. You took it. You put it on the dresser." She was close to him now, a swift smile on her lips. The man was almost beside them. She must have seen him coming as he turned the angle of the corridor.

"Oh! You're right." Dillon's glance lowered to her hands. The fingers were twisting and untwisting beneath her wrap, at its edge. He could sense her frightful inner agitation. He threw open his own door. "Better come back until we locate the key," he added.

She stepped past him, into his room. The man in the corridor went on by their door, and paused before that of the adjoining room. Dillon saw him

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thrusting a key into the lock, with the air of aggressive ownership a man displays when opening his own door.

Then, stepping back into his room, Dillon slammed the door and regarded his visitor.

Her smile had died out. She stood listening, one hand lifted to her lips as though to check frantic words, perhaps a scream. What a lovely creature she was! A mere girl, blue of eyes, black-haired; a long delicate face, charming in every detail. Riley Dillon's impulsive Irish heart went out to her. He dropped the monocle from his eye.

"It's quite all right, my dear," he said, with the warm, whimsical smile that was all his own. "He paid us no attention whatever—"

She was thrusting something away beneath her wrap. Her eyes dilated on him for one instant; then her lips quivered, and as she collapsed, Riley Dillon was barely in time to catch her. She had fainted.

Dillon did none of the usual foolish things that men do when a woman faints. He knew that such a swoon was nature's own corrective. Instead of fussing about her, he carefully let her down prone upon the floor. Then he straightened up.

"And now, begad, you're in for it!" he told himself. "This would be a hard thing for you to explain, me lad. Luckily, the chap next door seems to have missed nothing."

Turning to the rosewood humidor on his dresser, Riley Dillon extracted one of his special Havanas. He trimmed it and then, very carefully, lighted it. Few men know the art of lighting a cigar without overheating it and ruining its aroma. Quite ignoring the still figure on the floor, he finished lighting the cigar, then glanced at himself again in the mirror. He lifted the monocle and replaced it in his eye.

This glass, with its gold rim, made an imperceptible difference in his face. The warmth of his finely carven features was chilled. Their balance was removed. Behind that glass, Riley Dillon became an impervious sort of person, a challenging and almost arrogant man. It lent him a decided air of cold distinction. It was an excellent mask for his impulsive and friendly disposition.

He's a thief, picklock, rogue—but he never steals for profit. He steals for love—he has a passion for gems. He's smiling, debonair—but deadly poison to his enemies. He's written books on rare gems—and stolen half of the stones he describes. He's the man with the brogue and the monocle, the most fascinating rascal of them all—RILEY DILLON—the gentleman collector of other men's jewels!

THE girl lay there, breathing quietly, motionless, eyes closed. Riley Dillon glanced about the room, eyed his trunk, puffed at his cigar. He had not completely unpacked. In a secret compartment at the bottom of his trunk reposed some of the most priceless jewels in existence. Not things to be exhibited or sold, for most of them were stolen. Yet they could be loved by one who knew and appreciated them.

Riley Dillon never sold such things. He loved gems, not for their value, but for themselves. Few living men had his expert knowledge of them, his passion for them, even though this were an illicit passion. If he did not scruple as to their acquisition, he yet had his own code of ethics. Riley Dillon might be a thief, but he was a very gallant gentleman. And he never stole for gain. His life was bound up in jewels, as the lives of others are bound

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up in stocks or law or liquor. Gems formed his background, his reason for existence.

He listened. Still no noise, no sound of alarm, from the adjoining room. What had the girl stolen, in there? Something which those long, delicate fingers of hers, almost as slim and delicate as the fingers of Riley Dillon, had thrust away beneath her wrap. Color was coming into her face now.

Swiftly stooping, Dillon lifted her. She caught at his arm, her eyes opened.

"Oh!" Her voice was low, rich. "I—I almost fainted—"

"Almost. You're all right now," said Riley Dillon, and stepped back. His glass fell; he gave her a laughing look and bowed, telling his name. "You have quick wits. You did the one thing possible, my dear. For an instant, begad, you even fooled me!"

She looked at him, terror in her eyes; she seemed frozen.

"Will you do me the honor to look upon me as a friend?" he said quietly, and again gave her his name. In his voice, in his manner, was that touch of fine courtesy so instinct in him, a thing no woman could overlook. He went on speaking, more gravely now.

"Do not be afraid, I beg of you. Yes, I know that you were in that room; what of it? You were nearly caught; what of it? There are lies that sear, and lies that heal. There are thieves who scorn to steal, as I myself know. So put away your fears. If I can help you, if I can do you any service, pray consider me at your command. It would give me great happiness to aid you."

A shiver ran through the girl. A sudden wave of passionate emotion shook her. She dropped into a chair, and burst into a storm of tears.

"I—I failed, failed!" came almost incoherent words. "They were hidden—"

She gave way to her emotion. Her face was lowered in her hands, her whole slender body was shaking. Riley Dillon picked up the cigar he had abandoned, and waited calmly until the access was passed and she was somewhat herself once more. Then he spoke in a quiet, conversational tone.

"You were trying to get something in that room, then?"

"Our jewels, yes—"

She checked herself abruptly, looked up at him in alarm. Riley Dillon examined his cigar attentively, seeming to pay little heed to her words; in reality, he was wondering why she had failed, since she had certainly carried off something. He began to be curious. This girl was no hotel rat, no sneak thief. She had quick wits in a pinch, but not the sang-froid to keep from fainting when the pinch was loosened.

"Jewels!" he repeated, and laughed a little as he gave her a quizzical glance. "Well, you've come to the right man, in that case."

She seemed to see him, to be aware of him, for the first time. For an instant her gaze dwelt on the harsh, incisive lines of his face, the wavy black hair above his gray eyes; it flitted to his hands. No rings on those slim, deft fingers. More than once had Riley Dillon's fingers saved his life; despite his strength, they were supple, carefully tended. They were instruments of precision more delicately adjusted than any instrument of science. She evidently appreciated them, as the right sort of woman would.

"So you failed," said Riley Dillon, and smiled at her. Color rose in her cheeks.

"Yes. It—it was the first time I ever tried such a thing. Oh, so much

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depended on it! And it was not for myself, believe me!"

Dillon was startled by the agonized entreaty of these simple words.

"Oh, that's quite true, madame," he said gently. "You shouldn't attempt such work. For you, the first time must be the last; you're not fitted for this business. But for me, it's different. That's why I place myself at your command. Faith, I'd love to help you!"

His matter of fact tones, his touch of warm impulse, widened her eyes.

"What?" she said. "You have guessed? You know something—"

"I know nothing," said Riley Dillon, "except this—that any service you ask of me will be performed gladly."

A smile touched her lips, her eager eyes shone like sunlight. She came to her feet, one hand extended. Riley Dillon felt an absurd impulse to bend his lips to it. As usual, he obeyed impulse. She laughed a little.

Then she drew back.

"No, no, it is impossible," she broke out. "You see, it is not my secret. I am Anna Karsenovna. I have not the right to tell you. No doubt you think I am a thief?"

"Such a thought would be impossible."

"Thank you. But an explanation—"

"I have asked for none."

"But you have asked to help me."

"Right." Dillon smiled. "You mentioned jewels. I know a little about such things. I am yours to command."

"Thank you, again. Then—I may telephone you soon. May I go now?"

Riley Dillon was a gentleman. He bowed, went to the door, and opened it. With a nod and a touch of her hand, she was gone. Dillon closed the door after her, and lifted his eyes to heaven.

"Oh, you beauty—you thief—you adorable girl!" He burst into a laugh. "Faith, it's a raving maniac I am. Anna Karsenovna, eh? That means nothing to me. And did she work me for a fool, then?"

ON the face of it, he had caught a hotel rat and she had neatly wangled him into letting her go; but Riley Dillon knew better. Not because she was a girl of exquisite beauty. Riley Dillon, like any other man, could make a fool of himself over a lovely woman; but never over a lovely face. This girl, beneath surface indications, rang true.

Impulsively, he sat down at the telephone and called the desk.

"Riley Dillon speaking. Will you kindly tell me who has the next room and is making so much noise there—oh, Baron Mithoff, eh? Nobility? No, I won't make any complaint. He may quiet down. Thanks."

He called another number, that of Philp.

Now, Philp was not only a detective of sorts whom Riley Dillon had known for a long time, but Philp knew everybody or could find out about everybody. He supposed Dillon to be a lawyer or retired professional man. Many other people supposed the same thing, with variations. Philp was dependable, close-mouthed, and uncurious about his clients, and upon this man Riley Dillon was to some extent basing his New York campaign.

"Hello, Philp. Riley Dillon speaking."

"Oh, hello, Mr. Dillon! You ain't in town?"

"Yes, for a while. And I need some fast action, Philp. I want a report on one Baron Mithoff, who's here at the Waldorf. And I want a report on a charming young lady by the name of Anna Karsenovna. Both within half

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an hour. I don't know her address."

"Holy smoke! You don't want much, Mr. Dillon," said Philp plaintively. "What do you think I am, one of these here magicians? What can you tell me about 'em?"

"Nothing, except that they're undoubtedly Russian."

"Well, that ain't so bad. I got a pretty good lead on all the Russians in town," said Philp. "All right. I'll give you a call."

Dillon hung up and rose. Then he stood motionless, his eyes flitting over the room. Some trifling detail impinged upon his consciousness. Automatically, he sought to find what it was, scarcely realizing what he did. She had been after jewels in that adjoining room. She had failed to get them. Yet she had been hastily concealing something beneath her wrap. The contradiction—

Ah!

Suddenly he was alert, as his gaze picked up a tiny object on the floor. Instantly all else was swept out of his brain. He took a step forward, stooped, pounced on it. The thing must have fallen when she fainted. He took it over to the desk lamp, held it in the light, and eyed it in some astonishment.

A scarab of lapis lazuli met his gaze.

The rounded side was carven like a beetle's back, the flat side was graven with hieroglyphics within an oval, most delicately done. Riley Dillon's sense of gems, his acquaintance with them, his literal feeling for them, aided him enormously here. Instantly, his deft fingers told him that this was no ordinary scarab; but why not? The value of a scarab lies not in its composition, but in the graven message it bears, and Dillon knew nothing of things Egyptian.

Yet it must be investigated. Here in his hand, perhaps, lay the clue to the whole riddle of that charming girl.

GOING to his trunk, Dillon rummaged there swiftly. He invariably carried with him all the adjuncts of his chosen profession, and very curious indeed were some of them. He knew gems, not from theory, but from practical work. He himself could imitate a given jewel with all the cunning artistry of a Cellini. In this case, however, he needed a book.

He secured it, among a mass of pamphlets and monographs. A small book dealing with scarabs and nothing else, written long years ago by the great Flinders-Petrie. He carried it over to the desk, opened it, ruffled the pages, glanced over the plates. Implanted in his mind's eye was the oval picture of the scarab before him.

His work was swift, but it was not easy. Hundreds of illustrations here which he must compare with that scarab. The great Houdini could slip out of handcuffs in an instant; behind that instant lay years of patient muscular development and deft trickery. So with Riley Dillon's brain. Once, indeed, he had been a pupil of Houdini. It was altogether nearly six minutes before he found what he sought.

A thrill of recognition pulsed through him. Yes, it was the same! And it was followed by a printed note of explanation:

> Royal scarab of King Khufu of the IV Dynasty, almost earliest known. Rare and unique lapis scarab bearing the king's name. Formerly in the Hermitage Museum, now in the "good luck" necklace assembled for Empress Alexandra.

The good luck necklace!

"Heaven forgive me—it was here in this room and I let her walk out

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with it!" gasped Riley Dillon in sharp realization. "That's what she had under her cloak. And now she's gone. After stealing such a thing as that, she'd get away quickly. Telephone me, eh? She played me for a fool after all. Played me for a fool and made me like it, begad!"

His agitation was entirely pardonable.

And to think of such a thing happening on his first evening in New York, unexpectedly, a bolt from the blue! Riley Dillon always took advantage of luck, but he did not depend on it. He had come to New York with a certain definite campaign in mind. He even had a list of certain lovely objects he intended to obtain from New York's benevolence. He had resolved to let nothing tempt him, for example, until he had acquired the Mogul's Heart, that lovely and historic old ruby now owned by Gregg, the great corporation lawyer. But this was different. The Necklace of the Empress! The very name of it hurried his heartbeats.

This had not figured on his list. He did not even dream that it still existed, for it had vanished in the chaos of Russia. It had been made for the old Empress Alexandra from the finest and rarest scarabs to be obtained anywhere. Wrought by the greatest goldsmiths alive, it had been a glory of artistic conception.

The lapis scarab here on his desk had come from that very necklace. This scarab bearing the name of Khufu, commonly known as Cheops, the pyramid builder, was no imitation. Further, as he inspected it under his jeweler's glass, he noted the four tiny indentations, at either side, at either end, the marks of golden prongs that held the stone.

Dillon had forgotten the man in the adjoining room. He had forgotten his plans for the evening. He sat there staring at the faded blue stone that had adorned the breast of a king thousands of years ago, a stone whose intrinsic value was nothing, whose historic and artistic value was boundless. The necklace had been here, here in this room, and he had let her walk out with it!

With a sigh, he stirred, folded up the book and plates, dropped the scarab into his pocket. At this instant, his telephone rang sharply.

II

TO his real astonishment, Riley Dillon heard the girl's voice on the wire. He listened, then assented.

"Very well. I shall leave in five minutes."

Dillon laid down the telephone, frowning. Her voice was queerly agitated. She merely gave him the address, far downtown, and asked if he would come at once. The touch of mystery intrigued him, puzzled him, delighted him.

So she had not tricked him after all! He did not see how she could have failed in her errand, since she had got away with that necklace of a hundred marvels. Or were there jewels of more value in that adjoining room? Dillon carefully adjusted his tie, his muffler, donned his hat and coat. He picked up his green ebony stick, a plain, beautiful stick that was heavy as lead. Then he glanced at his watch.

Philp was invariably prompt in dealing with Riley Dillon, and but five minutes lacked of the half-hour. Best to wait, then.

From his humidor Dillon took one of his special Havanas, trimmed it, and then lit it with his accustomed care.

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Presently the five minutes was up. The telephone rang.

"Philp speaking, Mr. Dillon. I've got a line on the bird you mentioned. Seems he's one of the old Russian nobility who's got a drag with the Soviet. He went back some months ago to locate jewels and hidden stuff for a bunch of refugees here. He double-crossed 'em and swiped the stuff. He just reached New York the other day, and boy, if the Russians ain't burned up about it!"

"I see," murmured Dillon. "And the lady?"

"Wait a minute. I got that guy here; he knows everything there is to know about this Russian outfit. Hold the line." There was a moment of muttering silence, then Philp's voice again. "Here y'are, chief. She's the daughter of some busted princess who lives down on Fifteenth Street. Got a couple of brothers; they're snowbirds or cripples or something. I don't get it good. If you ask me, the outfit is lousy."

Dillon's gray eyes gleamed with satisfaction. Fifteenth Street! Right. This checked with the girl's story.

"Good work, Philp. Can you hold your source of information there for a while?"

"I can if he smells a five-spot, you bet."

"Make it ten. Hang on to him until you hear from me again. I'll call you later, and there's just a chance I may need information on the spot."

"I get you," said Philp. "But this ain't the office, see? The wife's got a bridge game on and this bird sets and looks like misery on a monument. All right."

Dillon rose. He adjusted the cord of his monocle — that gold-rimmed monocle which was so important in his scheme of things—cast a final glance in the mirror, and departed.

As the taxicab swept him downtown, Dillon eyed the streets hungrily, joyously; it was good to be back here again. Things awaited him here. He knew the city intimately. At length they swung off the Avenue, and his anticipation of what lay ahead was correct. The old portion of Fifteenth Street, dingy lodging houses stretching away in dreary prospect. The cab halted. Dillon instructed the driver to wait for him.

The third floor, she had said. The halls were dimly lighted, ill-smelling, unkempt. Had that flower come from such a place as this? On the third floor, he knocked at the door to the right. The girl herself, Anna Karsenovna, opened the door. He fancied relief in her face as she admitted him, greeted him, invited him to enter.

The bare room was eloquent of poverty. Another room lay beyond, where sat a woman; an older woman, aged rather by suffering and care than by years. Her features were those of the girl, but harsher. Pride had stamped them, and hard experience. Her eyes, also of blue, were cold and distant. Obviously, this was the mother.

"My mother," said the girl in French, "I desire to present M. Dillon, the gentleman who helped me."

The older woman eyed Dillon in cruel appraisal; still seated, she extended her hand. He bent above her wasted fingers, then looked down into her eyes and smiled slightly.

"*Madame,*" he said, also in French, "the greatness of my privilege in meeting your daughter is only exceeded by that of the honor now done me."

Her thin features warmed, her old blue eyes sparkled suddenly. He had judged her aright. This stilted cour-

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tesy, these formal phrases, were what mattered most to her amid this bare poverty and dingy environment.

"You do not know my name, *monsieur?*" she asked in a dry voice. Dillon shrugged.

"Now that I know you, your name is unimportant." He looked at the girl and nodded. "You told me your name. What does it matter? Names, titles—these are nothing. Only people are real."

"Yes," said the girl, bitterly. "The titles are gone long ago. Well, I have told my mother what happened at the hotel. She has decided to accept your offer of assistance; for she, after all, is the one to decide. There has been opposition. Even now—well, you must speak with her. She is the one."

What did she mean by opposition? There was still an air of mystery about all this affair. Riley Dillon could guess that he was dealing with Russian emigrés, no doubt people of high rank in the old dead days. He turned and bowed slightly to the older woman.

"If you acept my offer, *madame*, I shall be honored."

SHE scrutinized him in silence, then motioned to a chair.

"Sit down, if you please. I shall tell you what lies behind this matter. Like other Russians, we left our treasures concealed and escaped with very little, at the time of the Revolution. Lately the restrictions in Russia have been somewhat lessened. One Baron Mithoff, whom we supposed could be trusted, was able to enter and leave Russia safely. He undertook to retrieve certain things for us and for other people who were in our condition.

"Our chief treasures there were pearls of great value, wonderful pearls such as one seldom sees. Hidden with them was this necklace, of slight intrinsic worth, but none the less a thing which we valued highly."

Dillon's pulses leaped, as the woman moved her left hand. Beneath it, lying in her lap, was a glitter of gold and color. For one instant, he glimpsed the Necklace of the Empress; it could be nothing else. Then she covered it from sight again.

"Baron Mithoff went to Russia to get our treasures, and those of others. That was the end of it. What he found, he kept. In England, in France, he has sold the jewels of those who trusted him; he was involved with women; he squandered the money. He made report to us and to the others that he could not get the jewels, or that he found them gone. Well, he lied. Those he did not sell abroad, he kept. He kept our pearls, for in this country pearls fetch much better prices than abroad.

"Two days ago he reached New York to sell our pearls. We know about him; we are helpless, we and the others. We could prove nothing. We trusted his honor, and he has none. My daughter undertook to enter his room at the hotel. A Russian of our acquaintance works there and obtained a key that would serve. My daughter was the only one of us who could do this thing; the others wanted to kill the man. She went. You know the result."

Dillon gave the girl an admiring glance. He began to understand.

"Good Lord!" he breathed. "What if you had been caught?"

"Thanks to you, I was not," she replied calmly. "I obtained that necklace; it is proof that he has the pearls, since they were all hidden together in Russia. But I could find no pearls. He has them too well concealed."

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Dillon reached in his waistcoat pocket, took out the scarab of King Khufu, and laid it in the girl's hand.

"Take it, my dear, take it," he said, not without a sigh of resignation. "It's no good to me without the rest of the necklace. You dropped this scarab in my room."

"Oh! Then you did know all the time!" she exclaimed, amazed.

"No. I know that this came from the Necklace of the Empress, as it's called. A glorious thing, one that I covet with all my heart!" He smiled whimsically. "If I'd known you had it, there in my room—well, well, let it pass. Your mother is curious to know what we're saying, my dear. You'd better tell her."

The girl did so. When she had finished, Dillon turned to the older woman.

"*Madame,* I'll be off, with your permission. Shall I bring the pearls here?"

She frowned at him. "You think so lightly of the matter?" she asked icily.

"Faith, I don't think of it at all," he said, with his gay smile. "You may expect me anytime before midnight; perhaps later. Will you kindly describe the pearls?"

She did so, and his brows lifted in surprise. Well worth while, indeed! They should be worth a fortune, if undamaged. A few more questions. He gathered that these refugees, most of them barely able to keep alive, knew of Baron Mithoff's movements but were unable to proceed against him. After all, it had been a question of honor, not of legal matters.

"One moment." As Dillon was about to depart, the girl halted him. Her mother had said a low, quick word, no doubt in Russian. "She wishes me to ask you about the reward, in case you succeed in getting the pearls. Rather, I should say, your share—"

Riley Dillon took out his gold-rimmed monocle and screwed it into his eye. He looked at the older woman for a moment in silence, stared at

RILEY DILLON

her, met the angry glitter of her blue eyes. Then he let the glass fall, and turned to the girl with his quick, warm smile.

"Tell her," he said, "that she is no longer dealing with Baron Mithoff, but with a gentleman. Good night, my dear; rather, *au revoir!* You may expect me later."

So he departed, jauntily, but as he descended the ill-lighted stairs he gri-

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maced. He had let impulse run away with him, and it might be to his sorrow. He had not the slightest notion how to get those pearls from Mithoff. He felt sorry for the girl. Russians, eh? Poor devils, all of them, struggling against fate. Yes; with that old autocrat of a woman ruling her life, he pitied the girl.

He gained the second floor, then was aware of a man approaching him, a man who limped heavily and peered at him from a broad, flat face.

"Mr. Dillon?" said the man. Riley Dillon halted.

"It is."

"Would you step aside with me for a moment?" The other motioned to an open door near the stairs. "It is about Baron Mithoff; we must speak privately."

Curious, Dillon nodded assent. The half open door showed a lighted room. He was surprised, but he suspected nothing. He strode in through the doorway, then came to a halt as a pistol was jammed into his ribs. Another man had appeared from behind the door.

"Your hands—up!" snarled a voice at his ear. "Quickly!"

Riley Dillon obeyed. He could not very well do anything else.

III

DILLON was somewhat astonished that he was not robbed. He was frisked, but upon finding no weapons he was ordered to sit down. He dropped into a heavy oak armchair and regarded his two captors, who were conferring together, low-voiced.

The man who limped was dark, sallow, emaciated; but a certain fire blazed in his eyes. Like many cripples, nature evidently made up to him in intelligence for his bodily infirmity. The second man was older, and his face was scarred quite badly.

"Well?" demanded Riley Dillon pleasantly. He was inclined to be amused; at the same time, he decided that he did not like Russians—any of them. "May I ask what you propose to do, now that you have me here? If you wish money—"

"No, no. We do not want to hurt you," the cripple broke in. He had taken the automatic pistol from the other man. "That stick—put it down! Drop it, do you hear?"

Dillon let fall his green ebony stick. It thumped on the floor and rolled away.

"You will let my brother tie your wrists," went on the cripple calmly. "I'll give you a hypodermic of morphia, merely to keep you out of trouble. Later, we shall release you."

Dillon chuckled, but his amusement died quickly. He perceived that he was dealing with two very earnest, even desperate, men. Their eyes dwelt upon him with a disturbing intensity.

"Indeed!" he observed. "I have serious objections to being given a shot of morphia, of anything, in fact. What are your reasons for this absurd situation?"

The big man regarded him calmly, without interest. The cripple blazed up.

"You fool! You're not going to visit Mithoff, that's all. We'll do that ourselves. Michael and I mean to give that rat his deserts. You get the pearls, indeed! Nonsense. We'll get the pearls and pay him out to boot."

"Eh?" At this, Dillon was genuinely astonished. "How the devil do you know about the pearls?"

"Our mother lays down the law, but we do not always obey," said the cripple.

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Our mother! "Look here, is Anna Karsenovna your sister?" Dillon exclaimed.

"She is," was the curt reply.

The girl had spoken of opposition. It broke upon Dillon abruptly; he saw everything in a flash. These men were her brothers. They had opposed bringing him into the business at all. They wanted to kill Mithoff as much as they wanted the pearls. The older woman, more cautious, shrewder, wanted only to get back her property. But these two unbalanced fellows were out for blood. He remembered now. Philp had warned him about these brothers.

Alarm shot through Riley Dillon. The intensity of those burning eyes—no, there was nothing absurd about this affair. These men were horribly earnest. This cripple was by far the more dangerous; he seemed driven by a wild frenzy. The other man, Michael, was a placid ox. And to think of the girl having such men for brothers!

"Look here," Dillon began, "you're making a mistake. You wouldn't dare to shoot me in any case—"

The cripple jerked up his pistol. "You think so? You have come into this thing to rob us. You rascal! You think you can get the pearls and then decamp. You have fooled Anna, you have fooled our mother; but you are dealing with men. Any more talk, and I'll have Michael hit you over the head. Keep your mouth shut."

As he spoke, he drew closer. Riley Dillon's brain moved fast; on the instant he threw overboard every preconceived idea. Those eyes, burning into his, spoke of a frenetic lust for blood. The cripple was hovering on the borderline of the insane.

If he let this wild scheme go through, Mithoff would die, and the pearls would probably be lost; ruin would engulf all these wretched people, the girl included.

DILLON met the blazing eyes and leaned back in his chair. He disregarded the threat to kill him if he spoke.

"You forget the letter from Mithoff," he said calmly.

"What?" The cripple scowled down at him. "What letter are you talking about?"

"The one Anna took from his room, about the pearls. I have it here."

A flash of interest darted across the cripple's face.

"Where is it? Give it to me."

"No." Riley Dillon smiled. He crossed one leg over the other, pulled up his trousers, reached into his pocket for his cigarette case. So perfect was his assumption of a casual air that it held the scowling cripple spellbound. Dillon opened the case, took out a cigarette, put it between his lips.

"Let's be sensible," he went on with perfect composure. "This is a question of a large sum of money, my friend. Since you are Anna's brother, very well; you may as well learn the whole thing. But send that fellow Michael out of the room. His stare gets on my nerves. Then I'll turn over the letter to you."

He produced a pad of matches, struck one, and held it to his cigarette.

A glimmer of sanity came into the hot, burning eyes of the cripple. He could not but be powerfully impressed by the perfect calmness of the man who sat before him. He drew back a pace, then another. Then, without taking his eyes from Dillon, he snapped out something in Russian.

Without protest, without surprise, the scarred Michael turned and left the room. That he was completely under

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the dominance of this crippled brother, was obvious.

"Well?" The dark eyes flamed down at Dillon. "The letter! Where is it?"

Riley Dillon knocked the ash from his cigarette, and pointed to the walking stick on the floor. With such a person, he scarcely needed to be plausible.

"There, in the stick," he said calmly. "It comes apart."

The cripple moved back, glanced briefly at the stick of green ebony, then his gaze shot back at Dillon. He felt for the stick with his foot, then stooped and groped for it. Riley Dillon paid him no heed, but glanced about, saw an ash-tray on the table, and leaned forward. He carefully pressed out the glowing end of his cigarette.

In what he meant to do, he was taking a frightful chance, and knew it well. If his palms were sweating, he gave no indication of it, however. He looked up and saw the cripple fumbling with the heavy stick whose plain crook so evidently hid nothing.

"A lie!" broke out the Russian angrily. "What do you mean by it?"

Riley Dillon laughed lightly.

"My friend, you don't know the secret," he rejoined with amusement. "You don't know where to find the spring. Here, give it to me. I'll show you how it's worked."

He leaned forward and extended his hand. The cripple passed over the stick, then followed it, coming close, watching closely. His pistol covered the prisoner.

"Be careful!" he warned Dillon. "If you try to get out of that chair, I'll kill you!"

Dillon glanced up at him with a friendly, whimsical laugh, a lift of the brows.

"Nonsense!" he returned cheerfully. "We can't be very good friends if you talk that way. Remember, Mithoff expects to sell the pearls tonight or tomorrow. Now watch. One hand here, under the crook of the stick. The other hand grasps the stick farther down. Then a twist, to the left—"

That mention of the pearls being sold was the crucial thing. It jolted the cripple's mind off the business in hand, for a scant instant. Dillon wrenched at the stick. He wrenched again—and this time the ebony crook flew upward with the thrust of his arm behind it.

The crook of the heavy stick took the cripple squarely under the jaw, snapped back his head, left him stunned and dazed. The pistol jerked up spasmodically with his arm. Dillon tore it from his grasp, unfired. Then, swiftly, as one ends the agony of a stricken reptile, Dillon was on his feet and lashing out with the green ebony stick. It struck the Russian across the skull. He toppled forward. His head drove into Dillon's stomach and knocked the wind out of him. The pistol clattered to the floor.

Senseless, the cripple had all but knocked out his antagonist. Dillon lowered the limp figure to the floor, then straightened up in agony. Momentarily, he was helpless, gasping. And, at this instant of all others, the door swung open. Michael stepped into the room.

THE man was holding a hypodermic syringe, which he had evidently been preparing. He took in the situation at a glance. Unhurried, without apparent emotion, he laid the syringe on the table and then flung himself at Dillon with flailing fists. And Riley Dillon could not move. It was all so swift, all so desperately rapid, that he was just gasping the first

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air into his collapsed lungs, when the Russian barged into him.

A blow thudded home, knocked him back against the wall. Then Michael caught him in both hands and shook him. Dillon wakened. He still held the ebony stick. That scarred and savage face was close to his, hot breath panting into his eyes; hand clenched about the crook of the stick, he brought it up, brought it up again. Two cruel blows that rocked back Michael's head, loosened his grip. Then Dillon's left sank into his midriff.

Michael gasped. His arms fell. Dillon's fist landed again in the same place. Free of the man's grip, Riley Dillon pivoted, dropped the stick, brought up his right. Michael collapsed. He was not knocked out; he lay on the floor, moving spasmodically.

Dillon whipped off his muffler, threw himself on the man, drew the two wrists together and knotted the silken folds about them. He rose and went to the table. He examined the syringe. Yes, it was full, and the needle was in place.

Returning to where Michael lay, he bared the man's arm, plunged in the needle, pressed down the ring; the syringe was empty. Dazed, half senseless, the Russian lay mumbling something, but had ceased to fight.

Riley Dillon came to his feet. Panting, hurt, he stood for a moment collecting himself. He had nearly bungled the whole business, through letting himself be rammed by that falling cripple. He looked around the room. There was another room beyond, with two beds in sight. Probably the two brothers lived here. Each room had doors on the hall.

Stepping into the other room, Dillon found towels, and returned. Yes, Michael had stepped into the hall, then had gone into the adjoining room and prepared the syringe. After a moment Dillon had wrenched the towels apart. With the strips, he bound the senseless cripple and improvised a gag that was fairly efficient. This done, he looked at Michael. The latter had closed his eyes and lay breathing heavily, regularly.

"Fast-working stuff, begad!" murmured Riley Dillon. "Unless he's pretending—"

He stooped over the man, lifted an eyelid. No pretense here. Michael was safe to stay for a while—a long while.

Releasing the man's wrists, Riley Dillon tucked the silken scarf about his neck again, picked up the green ebony stick, and walked out of the place.

His taxicab was still waiting in the street. When he glanced at his watch, it was with a start of surprise. So little time had elapsed! Then he smiled grimly.

"Back to the Waldorf," he said, and got into the cab.

He relaxed gratefully on the cushions. It had been a near thing; he shivered a little at the memory of that cripple's burning eyes. So the two brothers thought that he meant to double-cross them all, eh? Well, that was not surprising.

He thought of the Necklace of the Empress, and sighed regretfully. It was a mere lingering glitter in his memory; he had not even been given a good look at it. Well, for the sake of that girl, he would play out the game. Her lovely face haunted him. Yes, play it out, and then be rid of the whole pack, girl and all.

He produced his leather cigar-case. Michael's fists had smashed the cigars. With a subdued oath, Riley Dillon lit

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a cigarette instead. He turned his thoughts to Mithoff. How was he to reach the fellow? By the least expected way, of course. Audacity always pays.

And since Mithoff had been only a few days in the country, he would know little about the ways of such hotels as the Waldorf. Yes, walk in upon him without warning. Why not?

Riley Dillon was smiling as he left his taxicab at the Park Avenue entrance. He had a cheery word for the elevator man, met a quick greeting from a bellboy in the car, the same who had taken him to his room. Already Riley Dillon was known here, liked, and his warm friendliness repaid. In a week's time he would be at home. His campaign would be opened by then—

Meantime, there was Mithoff.

He left the car, flung a gay word or two at the floor clerk, passed on down the corridor. But not to his own door. He passed this by, halted at the door of the adjoining room, and knocked sharply. There was no response.

Dillon hesitated, then turned and entered his own room. Here he caught up what seemed to be a large fountain pen. He unscrewed it, and dumped out on his writing desk a number of glittering metal segments, and a metal shank. Beside these he laid his room key, and swiftly selected the metal parts he desired. They fitted together and fitted into the shank; before him was a key which, with luck, would open any door in the place.

This little affair was Riley Dillon's own invention.

A glance into the hall, and he found it empty. Next instant he was at the adjoining door. His skeleton failed at the first try, then grudgingly shot the tumblers of the lock. Dillon flung open the door, stepped in, then stood staring as he swung to the door behind him.

IV

A GRAY-HAIRED man in evening dress, the same who had passed him in the hall earlier in the evening, sat at the desk. He was tied in the chair there, fast bound and gagged, with a blood-stained towel wrapped about his eyes. The room was in great confusion. As the man's feet were a number of plush cases, which might have once contained jewels.

Riley Dillon whistled softly. Someone had been ahead of him; and ruthless about it, too. The feet of Mithoff were bare, streaked with smoke; they had been burned, no doubt to make him give up his loot. Not long ago, either. The incense-smell of Russian cigarettes hung heavily in the room. Dillon could appreciate the devilish audacity of it, in this hotel.

The man tied in the chair had heard Dillon's entry. He began to make inarticulate noises, and to struggle faintly.

Dillon went to him. He examined the towel that served as gag, then removed it. He calmly pressed the cold iron ferrule of his cane against the man's neck. The baron's head lolled dazedly; there was an ugly contusion on his forehead.

"Quiet, my dear baron," he said in French, for Mithoff undoubtedly spoke that tongue. "Shout if you like, and I shall be compelled to shoot you. Someone got here ahead of me, evidently. Who was it? Speak up! Who was it?"

The man in the chair worked his jaw, broke into stammering speech.

"Gregory Sonsdorff," he said hoarsely. "Who are you?"

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"None of your business," was Dillon's cheerful reply. "Where does Gregory live?"

"God knows, I don't," groaned the wretched baron. "He has robbed me—"

"And apparently you deserved it. Very well. I advise you to be quiet for a while."

He left the room quickly, and returned at once to his own room. Here he disassembled the key, then went to the telephone and called Philp.

"Dillon again. Where can I find a fellow named Gregory Sonsdorff?"

"Hold the line, chief." Presently Philp spoke again. "This guy says he's a bad actor. The Russian crowd are down on him. He's another bird who's double-crossed the whole outfit. He's got a yap joint down in Greenwich Village called the Russian Eagle, a one-horse place."

"Thanks," said Dillon. "That's all for this time. Send me over the bill in the morning."

He rang off, rose, took one glance in the mirror, and departed briskly. Another five minutes, and a cab was rolling him back downtown.

Riley Dillon never carried a gun; at least, a loaded gun. He rather despised those who depended on cartridges when wits might serve. In the present instance, he was thoroughly well satisfied with the evening so far. He had unraveled a very tangled skein, he now knew exactly where he was going, and he had an excellent idea of the man he was going to see. Riley Dillon asked no more from destiny.

Leaving his taxicab in the Village, Dillon presently found his objective. This was one of the once-popular cellar restaurants, flaunting a double-headed Russian eagle for signboard, and by no means ill-looking inside. A few people were dining, and Dillon was accosted by a waitress in Russian costume.

"Has Mr. Sonsdorff returned?" he asked her blandly. "I was to meet him here."

"He came in some time ago, I think. Isn't he in the office?"

"Very likely, my dear—but where is the office?"

She laughed, led him to a curtained stairway, and held aside the curtain. With a nod, Dillon mounted the stairs, which led to some part of the house above.

A landing appeared, with a door on the right; it was closed. This, then, must be the office. Dillon paused, listened, heard nothing, and rapped.

After a moment, there was a step; not before a drawer had slammed shut. The door was opened. The man who opened it was tall, wide-shouldered, with a square, brutal head and bristly short hair.

"Good evening," said Dillon in French. "This is M. Sonsdorff, I think?"

"It is," snapped the other. "What do you want with me?"

"Possibly to save your life,," Dillon rejoined pleasantly. "Do you know that you suffocated poor Mithoff with that gag?"

The bold dark eyes of the man dilated. A startled gasp broke from him. Riley Dillon pushed his way into the room. It was furnished with a desk and chairs, a couch, a few flamboyant pictures, a threadbare carpet.

"Who are you?" demanded Sonsdorff, pulling himself together. Riley Dillon inspected him curiously.

"What is that to you? Or do you prefer to be arrested for murder?"

"Bah! You are not of the police—you, in that costume!" snarled Sons-

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dorff suddenly. "What's this talk about Mithoff? Who is he?"

One glance had told Riley Dillon that the jewels were not in sight. Now he drew up a chair and seated himself, and put his stick across his knees, easily.

"Rather clever fellow, Sonsdorff. Those Karsenovna brothers are downstairs; they want to see you. You'd better go down and speak to them before Michael comes smashing his way up. I'll wait here till you bring them back. We may settle things amicably."

A master stroke, using those names.

The burly, sullen features flashed alarm. Dillon's air of perfect ease, his mention of Mithoff and the gag, the very fact that he was a total stranger and yet knew so much, was staggering.

"They—you say they are downstairs?" broke out the man. "To see me?"

"Naturally. At the front door. Of course, if you prefer to deal with the police—"

Dillon shrugged and produced his cigarette case with a nonchalant air. Sonsdorff emitted one growling oath and then, turning, rushed from the room.

Swift as a flash, Dillon was out of his chair and at the desk. The top drawer. Locked, yes; but his gray eyes had been busy, and such desk locks were flimsy affairs. He seized a metal letter-opener from the desk, thrust it in, sprung the lock. The drawer came out to his pull.

Two handkerchiefs knotted together. Lumpy. He peered into one, then slipped each into a coat pocket. All done in perhaps twenty seconds from the time Sonsdorff turned and flung himself out. The drawer slid shut again. Riley Dillon picked up his stick and stepped out on the landing.

A shadow moved. Too late, he guessed the trap. A crushing blow took him between the shoulders. Another fell on the back of his head. He caught at the stair-rail, then slumped forward, and his limp body blocked the stairs.

V

SONSDORFF stood breathing heavily, poised, the slungshot in his hand. At his feet lay the silk hat of Riley Dillon, crushed, but it did not occur to him that Riley Dillon might have worn such a hat with a definite reason. It is extremely difficult to get in a good smash on any head wearing a silk hat.

"So!" Sonsdorff slowly straightened in the dim light, his gaze on the motionless body just below. "There was nobody downstairs. It was a lie. But he knew—somehow! He knew. And that means—"

Deftly, like the gliding movement of a snake, the crook of the green ebony cane slid up and caught Sonsdorff about one ankle. A startled cry escaped him. He caught at the stair-rail as he went off balance. With a subdued crash, his weight came down. There was a soft thudding sound; then again.

Two minutes later, Riley Dillon pushed aside the curtain at the foot of the stairs and stepped into the restaurant.

He had no hat; but his hair concealed the bump on the back of his head, and if his back hurt like the very devil, none would guess it from his carefree manner. The waitress came up to him as he stood brushing his sleeve.

"Did you find Mr. Sonsdorff there?"

"Eh? Oh, yes, yes, thanks to you!" and with his charming smile, Dillon

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dropped a coin into her palm. "He doesn't want to be disturbed for a while. Good night."

He crossed the floor, swinging his stick, and so departed from the place. Once in the street, his shoulders sagged a little. He was badly shaken up; his head was swimming. He needed a drink, and needed it badly. And he must make sure of his loot.

Presently, in one of the stall-like booths of a Chinese restaurant, he relaxed, sipping hot rice-wine, and furtively studying the contents of one of those knotted handkerchiefs. Although they had been described to him, he was amazed at the sight of those pearls. He knew the deep-sea gems intimately. His monograph on pearls, written under an assumed name, was a standard textbook for dealers. The famous pearls of the world were registered in his brain, but seldom had he seen such strands as these. Not only were they perfect, but they were perfectly graduated; and matched pearls are the rarest of the rare. Dealers may wait years to match a necklace thus perfectly.

Riley Dillon touched the glittering globules tenderly, softly. Their value meant nothing to him. Ordinarily, such gems would have kindled a sparkling fire in his veins, but these did not. Queerly enough, they held no temptation for him. Their purity, their limpid loveliness, made him think of the girl whom he had met this evening. Like them, she was a perfect and beautiful thing evolved from a sorry environment, from sickness of body and soul. A vast pity for her seized upon him. A wild vision came to him of rescuing her from that family, from all her past—then he came to his senses. She was content. She did not want to be rescued.

With a laugh, he glanced over the other jewels. Numbers of them, and valuable, too, but under the circumstances no temptation reached him. He shrugged, paid for his rice-wine, and departed, limping slightly. One knee had been banged in that fall.

He took a taxicab and went straight to the Fifteenth Street address.

Entering the lodging house, Dillon paused on the second floor and went to the room in which he had left the two brothers. They were still there, unchanged. The eyes of the bound and gagged cripple blazed up at him with virulent hatred. Riley Dillon laughed.

"Well, my friend, you were mistaken. Your brother will no doubt sleep for a while, but now I'll set you free. You shall see for yourself that I have no intention of stealing your precious bits of nacre."

He unfastened the strips of toweling. The cripple, amazed, said nothing, but let Dillon help him to his feet. Then he accompanied Dillon up the stairs to the floor above. The girl Anna opened the door, in astonishment at sight of the two men together.

DILLON found the older woman exactly as he had left her. He wondered if she had sat motionless all this while. He walked up to her, bowed, and silently extended the two knotted parcels.

"You'll find your property there, and the property of others as well," he said. "I trust you'll return it to the proper owners."

The pearls fell into the woman's lap. She trailed them through her wasted fingers, Anna and the cripple watching. Then she looked up at Dillon.

"*Monsieur,* I cannot permit you to depart with a mere word of thanks, yet I cannot insult you with mention of any reward."

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Riley Dillon smiled into her eyes.

"To be of service to you, *madame,* is its own reward. Good night."

As he turned away, her voice checked him imperiously.

"Wait!"

She nodded to Anna. The latter came up to Dillon and put a box in his hand. Her eyes were shining like stars.

"We heard how you expressed yourself regarding this, *monsieur,*" she said. "We shall all be happy to feel that it is in the hands of a friend."

Riley Dillon took the fingers of the girl in his, bowed above her hand. He took leave of the older woman with his grave courtesy. He looked at the cripple, who met his gaze but said nothing; and under those bitter eyes, Dillon took his leave.

Not until he was in the taxicab did he open the little box.

By the passing street lights he glimpsed the delicate, glittering thing of gold and ancient stones. In the box was the one loose scarab of King Khufu. Here in his hand was the Necklace of the Empress—his own.

"And to think, begad, that I came by it honestly!" Riley Dillon said.

Back in his own room at the hotel, he examined the necklace minutely. At length, when he had put the one loose scarab into place, he laid the necklace aside. He stripped, and in the mirror regarded the bruise between his shoulders.

"A small price to pay," he observed complacently. "And I think, if I call the desk and say I've heard groans from the next room, that poor baron will be released. An excellent idea—" and with a laugh, he bowed to his window. "New York, you have treated me well. I like you!"

New York, it was true, had treated Riley Dillon well. And there was better to come. Or was there? Beyond him, in the glittering lights, hidden, guarded, luring him forward, was the ruby known as the Mogul's Heart. Men had died for it before. It might be his turn this time. Ah, well, the thrill of the chase, thought Riley Dillon, would be flat and stale, if Death did not lurk in the background. But that was tomorrow.

He smiled, picked up the phone.

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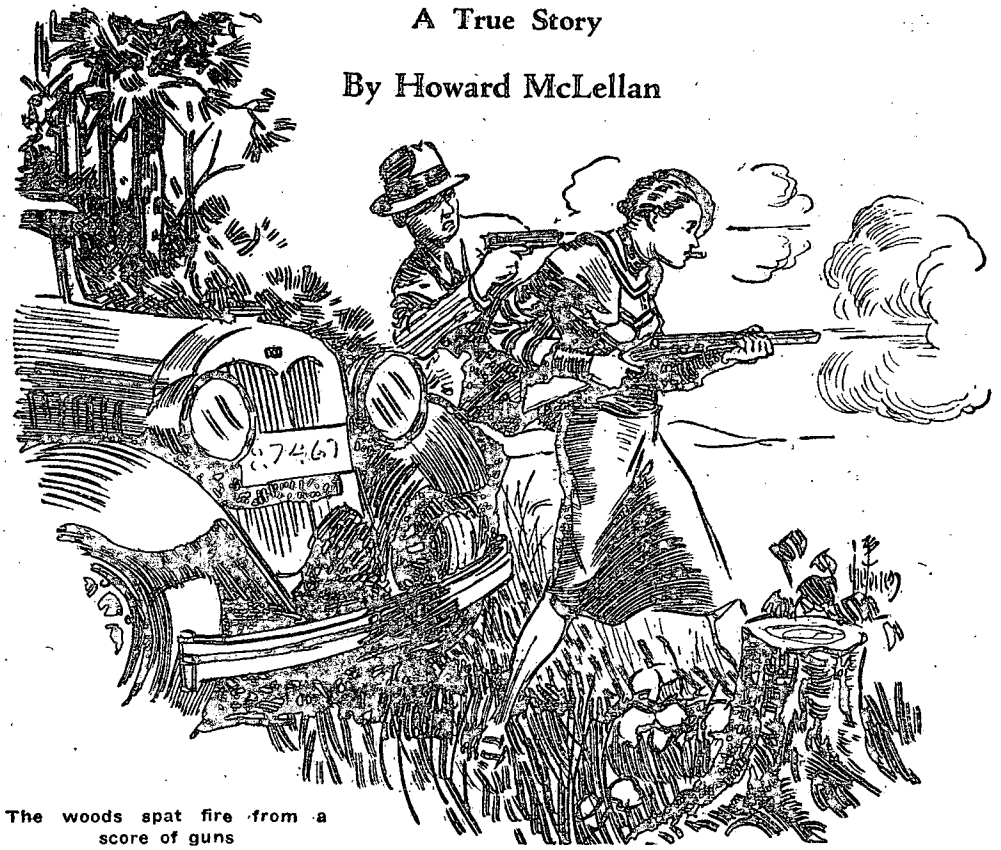
Suicide Sal

A True Story

By Howard McLellan



The woods spat fire from a score of guns

She Smoked Cigars, Wrote Bad Verse—and Terrorized the Southwest by Her Mad Murders—the Killer Moll of Texas—Bonnie Parker!

DURING the last three decades the onrushing tide of change altered the lives of women in all stations of life. Grandma of a quarter of a century ago would stand aghast at the modern woman and the things she does—things which, in grandma's days, were to be done only by men.

It was during this vortex of change that Bonnie Parker was born.

Drift back with history to the Gay Nineties. In the underworld of that easy-going day women criminals performed only those jobs to which they were suited by their sex and mode of dress. At shoplifting and pocket-picking women were more proficient than men. Naturally. They wore ample-sized skirts, blouses, cloaks and bustles which served as convenient caching places for "loads" they derricked. As swindlers and blackmailers the female was more adept than the male. But

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crimes which called for the use of a gun were outside the pale for molls of the Gay Nineties.

The male worthies of the underworld of that day had molls of course. They were made love to, paraded around and decked with stolen finery. But as partners in crime men held them in low esteem. The heavy who used a woman in his undertakings, or who attacked or robbed women, was regarded as a weak moll buzzer. Bonnie Parker had not yet come into the world.

Somewhere between 1900 and 1916 a new crop of male desperadoes appeared upon the scene. They were as much like the footpads of the Nineties as a rat is like a bear. Many of them were foreign and products of big city streets. They introduced molls as auxiliaries in armed combat.

The case of Annie Britt is not alone an early instance of young women participating in gunmen's battles. It also shows how such a trivial change as the length of a woman's hair gave women new rôles in underworld activities. In 1914 women had begun to crop their hair in mannish fashion. But Annie was an old-fashioned girl. No scissors would touch her blond tresses, which laid a golden sheen down her back when her hair was worn loose. It was her crowning glory. Done up, it made a grand, fluffy pompadour in front and plenty was left to make two great, glinting coils at the back of her head.

New York City's East Side melting-pot was a gory battleground for armed gangs contending for dominion of the underworld and control of various blackmailing rackets. The Dopey Benny Fein gang, headed by a sawed-off, rat-faced gunman of that name, and consisting of Waxey Gordon, Little Orgie, and Shorty Gordon, set out to wipe out their enemies. Fein and his cohorts each had police records. Whenever encountered by the police they were frisked for gats; the finding of a gun in their possession would mean at least seven years in the big house.

SO they asked Annie Britt to kindly do them a little favor. She was the only wild woman around who didn't have her hair bobbed. The mob had a little job of murder to pull off, but, in the matter of packing the necessary gats, they were up against it. The police would frisk them and that would be that. In their extremity Blond Annie accommodated them. The mob assembled under a stairway, Annie with them. Presently the man marked for slaughter came peacefully along the sidewalk on the other side of the street.

"Gats," snapped Dopey Benny. He reached out an empty hand; his fellow mobsters did likewise. Annie put a hand up to her pompadour, pulled out two gats, handed them to two boys; then, tucking her hand under the blond coils at the back of her head, produced three more guns and laid them in open hands.

Blue fire streaked from under the stairway. The man across the street went down, riddled. Annie looked on, grinning. Dopey Fein gulped. "Okay, Annie, youse can scoot now and, say, t'anks a lot." Her job finished, Annie Britt went blithely swinging down the street, five warm-barreled gats in her done-up hair. It was only when the police began to wonder why Annie wore her hair long when all her pals had bobbed theirs that they fathomed the mystery of how Benny and his sharpshooters had obtained their gats.

By 1926 gun molls were in wide use as gun carriers, employing not only

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Annie Britt's trick, but using their large handbags and fat pies and cakes as nesting places for gats. Twenty-year-old Candy Kid Whittemore, who gathered up several millions with his gatted mob, employed his red-headed flame, the Tiger Girl, as mistress of the mob's gats. Daily, after washing the breakfast dishes, the Tiger Girl opened a trunk and oiled, polished and tested nearly a trunkful of gats and had them ready for the mob. As to firing a rod, however, neither Annie Britt nor the Tiger Girl cared for the flash of blue and the kick-back which came with the recoil.

Evolution was, however, speeding on. Celia Cooney, bobbed-hair gun-girl, had ventured out upon the stick-up, but had great difficulty in controlling her palsied trigger finger; Celia could not bring herself to the point of firing at her victims. The bobbed hair gun-girl was not a killer moll.

IN 1926 Bonnie Parker was seventeen, a fiery-eyed, wasp-waisted miss, growing to womanhood along the river bottom section of West Dallas, where the brothers Barrow had learned to manipulate guns in the well-known Texas quick-draw fashion.

West Dallas, February 20, 1932...

A dust-laden wind howled through the streets. On a sidewalk along the river a young woman halted to gather about her the flaring folds of a blue skirt. Her sharp little chin set hard, her head down, she struggled bravely against the wind. At length a lull came. She glanced up. A thin young man, with hardly any chin, stood staring at her with piercing dark eyes, his large mouth stretched by a vast grin.

They glared at each other. The young man tipped his soft, rakishly-slanted hat to the back of his head. The girl touched a hand to the neckband of a jersey sweater and smiled.

"Maybe—say, have I seen you before?" the man asked.

"I don't think so. My name is—Bonnie Parker."

"Say, that's a kind of pretty—"

"Never mind the kidding," Bonnie put in. "What's your name?"

"Barrow—Clyde C. Barrow."

"What's the 'C' stand for?"

"Champion."

"What an odd name!"

"Odd names run in the family," said Barrow. "I gotta brother named Marvin Ivan, but he's Buck Barrow to everybody. Married, sister?"

She glanced down at a gold band on a finger, held it up.

"So am I," grinned Barrow.

"I don't use my married name," said Bonnie. "I've got a husband. He works, but—"

"You're just out looking around? Well, so am I." Barrow turned his head, glanced down the street. Bonnie narrowed her eyes at his wavy brown hair, smiled, and, when he suggested that they go to a speakeasy, she bobbed her head and took his arm. They went hurrying along, the wind helping them.

II

THEY had a drink in the speakeasy. Barrow sat with his empty glass in hand, studying his new friend. The close-fitting collar of her jersey, the red and yellow stripes crossing the front of her sweater, the little vestlike jacket hanging from her shoulders, and the tight fit of her skirt around her waist and thighs made her look masculine. The brows above her eyes seemed swollen. She was not pretty, yet there was a fascinating loveliness in her eyes and in her manner.

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"You don't look like you've bucked up against the world much," Barrow finally remarked. "Nothing like I have."

"I'm young," she smiled. "Give me a chance."

Barrow drew a pack of cigarettes from his pocket, offered one to her. Instead of reaching for it she slipped a hand under her jacket, glanced furtively around, drew the hand. It held a long black cigar. She bit off the tip of the cigar, and stuck it in the corner of her mouth and asked him for a light.

He had never before seen a woman smoke a cigar. He kept staring at her as the flame from his match lit up her face. Then, to his utter amazement, she inhaled the strong smoke and let it drift out of her mouth. He read his own meaning into the act. The girl was not only a strange creature, but she was tough. So was he. The bars were down. She could be trusted with his secrets. He unfolded them in rapid succession. He told his companion that both he and his brother Buck were outlaws. She drew her chair closer. Her eyes widened with interest. She shifted her cigar to the other corner of her mouth as he told her that he and his brother had served time in prisons for motor thefts and safe-blowing. Just a few days before their meeting he had been paroled from a penitentiary.

"That was due to a woman," he said. "The woman I'm married to. You see, I escaped from a pen in 1930, met this country girl and we got married in Oklahoma. I told her all about my record. She didn't leave me. She begged me to go back to the pen, serve my time, come out and settle down with her. So I went back to the pen, served out my time and then—well, I was going back to her when I ran into you."

"Then you love her?" Bonnie Parker, anxious-faced, leaned to hear his answer.

"I guess I do—yet it's this way. I don't seem to want to go back to her. Pretty and decent and all that—still I don't want to go back. I can't explain why."

"I know why," said Bonnie. "You want a woman that'll lead the same life you do."

"A woman—a woman like you, huh?"

"A woman that can take to the road, forget she is a woman and stand up and fight alongside her man. The way I feel about it is—" She held out her hand. "Let me have a pencil."

"Don't happen to have one."

Bonnie called the waiter, got a pencil and a menu. Her cheroot tipped up at a sharp angle, she began to scribble on the back of the menu, finally pushed it across the table. He read the handwriting, a childish scrawl:

To love and live while the world goes on
And die in the arms of your man.
To fight at his side, day, night and morn,
Is all that I wish to do.
And when we are dead to lie by his side,
That's how I feel about you, my Clyde.
SUICIDE SAL.

He looked up, grinning out of the side of his small mouth. "You write poetry, eh?"

"When I feel something inside of me like I feel now." She caught his hand. "I mean it, Clyde. I'll go to the end of the world with you. Die with you and be buried at your side. I'm ready for anything."

"You mean that?"

Bonnie took the cigar from her mouth, looked at it and smiled. "I'm not like other women. Never wanted to be. I'm crazy about the open—to be where there's shooting—and handle a

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gun." She looked up. "And never be taken alive."

Clyde Barrow crumpled the bit of crude verse into a pocket. Bonnie's hand was held out before him. "Shake on it—like two men would."

Their hands locked. The team of Suicide Sal and the fiercest of the Barrows was formed.

CLYDE BARROW was possessed of an instinctive distrust of women as joint partners in criminal enterprise. For the first week after he had locked hands with Bonnie Parker he raided filling stations with an ex-convict and old-time yegg, Frank Clause, while the girl sat in the machine that carried them about on their raids for pin money. An extra supply of guns was always in the car.

It was after a fat Saturday night haul that Barrow and Clause rushed back to the car to make their getaway and found Bonnie with a sawed-off shotgun in her lap and a cigar in her mouth. This sight apparently convinced the bandit that the girl was not afraid of a gun.

"I was just waiting," she said, "to see if I wouldn't get a chance to use it."

"You may get a crack with it tonight," Barrow said. He jumped in and took the wheel, drove furiously. Clause, the seasoned yegg, objected strenuously to working with a woman. He was let out. Bonnie was all for going it alone with Barrow, but the bandit insisted that three were needed—two heavies to put on the works and a lookout to sit in the car and do sentry duty. He drove into West Dallas and picked up a tall, rangy ex-convict named Raymond Hamilton.

The trio drove to Lufkin, Texas, pulled up at a filling station, ordered the manager to put on his hat and go out for the air. In the presence of guns the manager obeyed, got into the car and was amazed to see a yellow-haired girl sitting with a cigar in her mouth and a sawed-off shotgun in her lap. Twenty-six dollars was taken from his trousers and he was thrown out. Bonnie Parker wanted to empty a load of buckshot at him.

"He's had a look at me and he'll squeal," she insisted. She was aiming the shotgun at him when the car bounded off. "It was a bull not to kill him," said Bonnie, with a tone of regret.

In the dead of night Barrow swung into a tourist camp near Hillsboro, parked the car and led the girl and Hamilton up a wooded hill. He had a sheet of brown wrapping paper in his hand. This he tore into small pieces. He pinned one of the pieces on a tree trunk and handed an automatic to Bonnie.

"Try your hand at that, Sal," he said. "The kickback from that sawed-off cannon would knock you over."

She took a mannish stance, fired and twice hit the paper.

"That's near enough," said Barrow. The three retired to a tourist cabin.

They drove into Hillsboro in the morning, got a newspaper and found their exploit of the night before blazed on the front page. The police had discovered that a girl named Bonnie Parker, who smoked cigars, had been seen driving around in West Dallas with one of the Barrows and an ex-convict, Hamilton.

Bonnie glared at Barrow. "You see, that filling station guy tipped off the police. But that won't hurt, Clyde. It'll only make things more interesting. Where's the sport if you're not chased?"

"It also means that we leave no live

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guys around on the next job to spill to the police," said Barrow.

The next job was not far away. Barrow drove to a jewelry store, went in and asked the proprietor for a package of guitar strings.

"This isn't a music store—this is a jewelry shop," said the owner.

"That's too bad," said Barrow.

BONNIE PARKER

"Then let's have change for this." He held out a five-dollar bill.

"Can't change it." Something in the surly manner of his customer made the jeweler reach under the counter for his gun. Trained to the quick draw, Barrow yanked out his automatic and fired at the jeweler. He dropped—dead. Barrow reached into a showcase as the jeweler's terrified wife appeared in the rear, clad in a nightgown.

"Get back there," Barrow yelled, "or you'll get what he got." She obeyed. Barrow bolted out, leaped into the car.

"Did you get him?" asked Bonnie.

"I did the best I could. Now for the hills around Nacogdoches. I was born there. Know every inch of the country."

III

BEFORE daybreak the trio were in Nacogdoches. Barrow grabbed a newspaper from a delivery boy and gave it to Bonnie to read while the car sped on. Suddenly she caught his shoulder. "Clyde—you'll have to step on it. Cops were at that tourist joint back in Hillsboro. They found two automatic shells on the ground and my lipstick and—two cigar butts of mine."

Hamilton glared at her. "That's what we get for packing a dame around."

"And, Clyde," she cried, "I left a coupla butts back where we camped last night. And this sheet says—it says the Texas Rangers are after us."

Barrow bit his lip. "Frank Hamer's bunch after us, huh?"

"Yeah," muttered Hamilton. "The deadliest man-hunting bull in the country."

"That only makes it the more interesting," chirped Bonnie, sitting up and clapping her hands.

Despite this show of joy and bravado Clyde Barrow plunged the accelerator to the limit.

For a month the trio ranged the countryside around Dallas, switching from one stolen car to another, robbing filling stations, stores and small banks to provide the wherewithal to eat and sleep and to purchase an occasional sheet of new music to satisfy Clyde Barrow's appetite for saxophone tunes. Daily newspapers supplied them with details of the hunt that was on for them. Several times they dashed into Dallas, put on stick-ups and then struck out for the open country.

In the late summer of 1932 Hamilton disclosed that he too had a hobby.

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Sighting a country dance going on in a rustice pavilion near Atoka, Oklahoma, Hamilton expressed a desire to stop off and have a few dances. He winked at Bonnie, she bobbed her head. Barrow headed the car into a parking space, halted it, suddenly crouched and stared through the windshield at two badged men standing on the stairway leading up into the dance hall.

"Badges," Barrow muttered.

The two deputies came wandering up to the car. Barrow laid the nose of his automatic on the top of the door and let go. Bonnie Parker's gun spat out a blue streak. The deputies sank to the ground, one dead with a bullet through his heart, the other wounded five times. Barrow shot the car back into the highway and struck out for Corsicana, Texas.

Bonnie Parker picked up Barrow's gun, put two notches in the grip with her nail file as the car pitched along. Barrow turned his face toward Hamilton and leered at him, "That's what you get for wanting to shake your hoofs with my—"

The girl screamed. The car was plunging down an embankment. It toppled over, pinning Barrow, throwing the girl and Hamilton into the grass. Blue flame crept from the hood as Bonnie pulled her man out. Barrow, glaring at Hamilton, groaned to his feet. The girl spotted a farmhouse, grabbed a gun from the car and started for it. She came back with a frightened young farmer at the wheel of a Ford. He drove them to Clayton, Oklahoma, and was set free to return home.

BY daylight next morning the murderous crew were six hundred miles away and in need of a new car. In Carlsbad, New Mexico, Bonnie's eyes found a big eight unoccupied. A man was standing near it. She told Barrow to drive up to it. The trio got out, clambered into the eight. Bonnie stuck her gun into the chest of the stranger. "Pile in here, you, or I'll blow you up." He got in and fifty miles away was dumped into an arroyo, alive.

The car sped on, Bonnie now at the wheel. Ploughing through the dust she saw a crowd of armed men gathered on a bridge. The car swept past them, gunfire belching from it. The men gave chase, lost the big car, and for another month the trio cruised the Texas hills.

Bonnie Parker filed another notch in Barrow's gun, recording the killing of a grocery clerk who had ventured to object when Barrow rang open the cash register. More banks were robbed. Bonnie, serving the two men as finger, visited the banks beforehand and sized them up. She had dyed her yellowish hair a flaming red and wore a dress and shoes of the same brilliant hue.

Hamilton, flush with money from the bank jobs, could hardly keep his eyes off the flaming creature. He proposed to take her to a dance. She promptly vetoed the offer, recalling the misfortune which had attended them at the last dance hall they had stopped at. He took a sudden dislike to the girl, jerked a cigar out of her mouth.

"What's the idea?" snapped Barrow.

"What th' hell — it burns my stomach to see a dame smoking a rope. Anyway, this dame's got the nerve to tell me she's worth half a dozen of my kind."

"Well, she is—she can handle a gat in both hands," Barrow retorted.

Hamilton lowered a foot to the running-board. "There ain't a car big enough in this world to hold her and me at the same time." He got out, scowled back at Bonnie and made off.

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"He wasn't so hot," sniffed Bonnie. "And we don't need another man."

"Gotta have one," Barrow said. "It's okay. I'll have a good one next time. Buck, my brother. He's a hell-raiser and it won't be long now before he's out of the big house. His wife, Blanche. She'll make a swell pal for you."

Bonnie Parker's square face darkened. She had been on front pages for months, the gun-toting, cigar-smoking terror who had fought side by side with the fiercest of the Bloody Barrows. She wanted no other woman to share that lurid distinction. She was somewhat placated when Barrow told her it would be a month or so before Buck got out; in the meantime he would pick up Frank Hardy or Hollis Hale, each with a multiplicity of prison records. To locate Hollis and Hardy it would be necessary to make a spurt into Dallas.

Breezing into Belton, Texas, Barrow spotted a new car, halted the one he was in, got out and opened the door of the new machine. A man came up to him, asked him what he meant. Barrow whipped out his gun, fired at him, missed. The man came at him and a blast of fire riddled him. He was dead when Barrow leaped into the old car and spurted away, heading for Grapevine, Texas. Here an evening paper advised him that Hamilton had been arrested and sentenced to two hundred and thirty-six years in prison.

"Now watch him squeal," said Bonnie.

"No, he won't," said Clyde. "If he does he knows I'll get him. If he stands pat he knows I'll pull him out. We'll drive to Hillsboro, where he's in the can, and see if we can see him. We'll go to his people's house."

Within a few minutes of midnight Barrow halted the machine in front of the county jail. A deputy sheriff, enjoying a smoke on the jail steps, saw the car and came for it. A shotgun spilled a red flash and Bonnie Parker dropped it into her lap. The deputy rolled down the steps, his head blown off. Barrow jumped to the running-board, gun in hand. His moll twisted in behind the wheel and the car raced off.

In a tourist camp that night, while Bloody Clyde tooted his saxophone, Bonnie Parker filed a notch in the stock of the sawed-off weapon she had so long waited to use.

They lingered at the camp ten days, watching the newspapers, gloating over accounts of the futile search under way for them. News came that Hamilton had been sent to Eastham Prison Farm in Texas to serve as many of those two hundred and thirty-six years as Fate would allot to him.

"He won't serve even two," Barrow leered. "You and me, pal, will get him out." A few days later he learned in a newspaper that his brother Buck had been released. He sat down and wrote a letter to Blanche Barrow, inviting her and Buck to meet them at a swell tourist camp, Freeman's Grove, near Joplin, Missouri. He advised her also to spread the news that he and Bonnie were on their way to Leavenworth, Kansas, to haul a relative out of the Federal prison there. This tip would send cops rushing to Leavenworth. With this ruse working, Buck and Blanche could safely make their way to Freeman's Grove.

IV

AFTER a long, hard drive, Bonnie and Clyde reached Freeman's Grove.

Presently they were joined by Buck and Blanche and a reunion feast cele-

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brated the occasion, Clyde pumping his saxophone, Buck playing a guitar and Blanche dealing out hot torch songs in a shrill voice.

Bonnie did not participate in these festivities, save to hold her eyes with savage steadfastness on Blanche. And Blanche had come prepared. She was dressed in white riding breeches and high-polished cavalry boots. A man's silk shirt was open at the throat, a soft black hat was rakishly pulled down over the back of her head. Her eyes were jet black, her nose tipped up.

Buck and Clyde tried to get the two women together to do a dance, but Bonnie could not be persuaded. All she cared to do was stare at the six-shooter sticking out of a white kid belt around Blanche Barrow's waist.

The next day Bonnie transformed her red hair into brown, put her red shoes and skirt into the stove and burned them. A fretful mood settled upon her. Perhaps it was the coming of the other woman that unsettled her. At any rate she picked up a pencil, sat at at a table, narrowed her eyes at the window. At last she began to write.

You have read the story of Jesse James,
Of how he lived and died.
If you are still in need of something to read
Here is the story of Bonnie and Clyde.

Now Bonnie and Clyde are the Barrow gang,
I'm sure you all have read
How they rob and steal
And those who squeal
Are usually found dying or dead.

There are lots of untruths to their write-ups,
They are not so merciless as that;
They hate all the laws,
The stool pigeons, spotters and rats.

They class them as cold-blooded killers,
They say they are heartless and mean,
But I say this with pride
That I once knew Clyde
When he was honest and upright and clean.

But the law fooled around,
Kept tracking him down
And locking him up in a cell,
Till he said to me,
"I will never be free,
So I'll meet a few of them in Hell."

This road was so dimly lighted,
There were no highway signs to guide,
But they made up their minds
If the roads were all blind
They wouldn't give up till they died.

The road gets dimmer and dimmer,
Sometimes you can hardly see.
Still it's a fight, man to man,
And do all you can,
For they know they can never be free.

If they try to act like citizens,
And rent them a nice little flat,
About the third night they are invited to fight
By a submachine gun rat-tat-tat.

If a policeman is killed in Dallas
And they have no clews for a guide;
If they can't find a friend
They just wipe the slate clean
And hang it on Bonnie and Clyde.

Two crimes have been done in America
Not accredited to our mob,
For they had no hand
In the kidnaping demand
Or the Kansas City depot job.

A newsboy once said to his buddie:
"I wish old Clyde would get jumped.
In these awful hard times
We might make a few dimes
If five or six laws got bumped."

The police haven't got the report yet,
Clyde sent a wireless today,
Saying "We have a peace flag of white
We stretch out at night,
We have joined the NRA."

They don't think they are too tough or desperate.

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They know the law always wins.
They have been shot at before
But they do not ignore
That death was the wages of sin.

From heartaches some people have suffered,
From weariness some people have died,
But take it all in all
Our troubles are small
Till we get like Bonnie and Clyde.

Some day they will go down together
And they will bury them side by side.
To a few it means grief,
To the law it's relief,
But it's death to Bonnie and Clyde.

SHE cocked her head and sighed as she laid down her pencil. Her hand crept to a batch of snapshots, and as she ran through them she grinned. In one she was standing in front of an automobile, playfully holding a sawed-off shotgun at Clyde Barrow. Another showed her sitting on the grass with a lap full of pistols. In still another she was holding Barrow's hand, an array of guns parked in a chromium guard running around the car's radiator gave off a blue and silver glint.

They were guns that had killed and wounded, guns that had been taken from murdered and riddled victims! From maudlin verse to ghastly records of slaughter. She was indeed a creature of strange contradictions.

Suddenly she flew to a front window and saw two open automobiles filled with men. The cars turned the corner and circled the block. She ran to a door leading into the garage.

"Clyde—there's been a tip-off." She raced down into the garage and seized her sawed-off shotgun. The two Barrows grabbed pistols and peered out through the garage window. The cars had halted. A man in uniform was coming toward the door. Bonnie opened the door slightly, poked the blunt nose of her shotgun out and triggered a blast at the constable. He went down, dead. Two men leaped from the car, automatics in their hands. A volley of buckshot and pistol slugs dropped them. A volley of bullets crashed into the garage door. Clyde seized a Browning automatic rifle and sprayed the two cars. Two more officers dropped. One started on his knees for the garage and Bonnie blasted him with buckshot. He fell back, mortally wounded. Buck Barrow ran out of the garage, gave the police car a push; it went down a hill, crashed against an oak tree. The two outlaws and their women piled into a car in the garage, leaving behind them four wounded officers, one mortally, and a constable who was dead. The bandit car sped through Joplin. Bonnie Parker suddenly cried in terror: "I've left my snapshots and my poems and everything we own."

Blanche Barrow spoke up: "Yes, and I had to leave my marriage certificate and Buck's pardon from the pen."

"Hell," said Buck. "We've left behind all the guns except these we got in our hands."

Clyde Barrow merely grinned and swung the car into the curb, halting it in back of a sedan. The sedan shot ahead. Clyde overtook it, ordered the man and woman in it to get out and the bandit crew sailed off. Bonnie glanced back and saw a car following them. The man at the wheel slowed up. As the pursuing car came up he swung across the road and halted it. The Barrows and their molls hopped out of the sedan and climbed into the stalled car, held guns at the driver and his woman companion and dumped them out five miles ahead.

They were in the Ozark Mountains

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by the evening of next day and in Fort Dodge, Iowa, the following day, having halted only to purchase canned food which they ate in the car. At one of the halts Bonnie brought back news that the town was plastered with circulars offering $2,000 reward for the capture of the Bloody Barrows and their women. And the circular contained excellent photographs of the men as well as their women—the snapshots which they had left behind in their murderous flight from the Freeman Grove tourist camp. Without their women the Barrows went out on forays, knocking over filling stations and small banks to get money to buy food and a new saxophone for Clyde.

V

IT was strange country to Bloody Clyde. On April tenth he drove his crew to Wellington, Texas. The need of sleep made him dizzy. The car rolled from the highway down an embankment, tipped over and burst into flames. The Barrows and Buck's wife crawled out. Bonnie was pinned inside. They hauled her out, her arms and shoulders seared. Clyde carried her up to the highway, halted the first car that came along and put her into it. He pulled a gun on the driver; the rest of the crew piled in and they were off for medical attention.

The rush of wind threw back the driver's coat. Clyde spotted a badge on the vest. He ordered the car stopped and the driver was thrown out. Clyde took the wheel and as the car started off he yelled back, "Thanks for the car, old boy. I'm Clyde Barrow."

The dumped driver, a deputy sheriff, stood open-mouthed and dazed.

Bonnie's burns were dressed in the next town and Bloody Clyde headed the car for Arkansas, slaying a town marshal on the way because he had the audacity to ask him for a driving license. For weeks the mob hid in the Ozarks, while Bonnie recovered from her burns. An occasional newspaper told them that the authorities in six States were combing all roads for them. At length Clyde broke camp and the crew hit the bloody trail again, stopping at tourist camps, only to be flushed into getaways when strange eyes regarded them too curiously.

In July, 1933, the mob spent a night in a tourist camp between Dexter and Redfield, Iowa. Clyde was tooting his saxophone when Bonnie cried that she had seen a man's face in the woods. She dropped a coffee pot and the Barrows snatched up their guns.

"Drop those guns," came a cry from the woods. Bonnie, Clyde, Buck and Blanche joined in a volley. The woods spat fire from scores of guns. Clyde clapped a hand around his arm where a bullet had clipped it. He ran for the car, followed by his crew. A hail of bullets ripped into the steel body of the car. Bloody Clyde lost control of the wheel and the car crashed into a stump.

Buck jumped out, crouched behind a stump. Blanche was at his side. They pumped lead into the woods. Bonnie Parker slid in behind the wheel and drove off, got out with Clyde and piled into another car parked by a posse along the highway. They raced away as a burst of massed fire blazed from the woods.

It was not until nightfall that they halted to buy a newspaper. Bonnie glanced at the headlines and scooted off to a store. When she returned she was dressed in bright red shoes and a flaming sweater. There was a strange glint in her eyes. The headlines explained not only this but the change of

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dress. She had been afraid right along that Blanche Barrow's long and studied glance at Clyde Barrow meant that she was fascinated by him, as she herself had been fascinated by him that windy day back in Dallas. But now Blanche and Buck were captured. Blanche was unharmed, but Buck's jaw was shot away, his body riddled and his death was only a matter of a few days.

A brooding silence settled over Clyde. Bonnie recited from memory the last verse of her doggerel:

"Someday they will go down together
And they will bury them side by side.
To a few it means grief,
To the law it's relief,
But it's death to Bonnie and Clyde."

For a long time Clyde drove on in silence. Presently he cast a swift glance back at the rear seat. "Hell," he exploded, "we haven't got a gun." Then he grinned down at his flaming mate. "But it's okay, Sal. I'll fix that. Yeah—not only take care of that little matter but spring Ray Hamilton from the pen at Eastham."

"You mean you're actually going to yank him out of prison?"

"Yeah—him and whoever wants to be yanked out with him."

Bonnie Parker sat up and clapped her hands. "That sounds like the biggest thing yet."

Clyde nodded. The machine ploughed into Enid, Oklahoma. He brought it to a halt before a red brick State armory, hurried into the building and came out lugging a heavy gunny sack. He threw it into the back of the car, got back at the wheel and said, "There's thirty-four army automatics in that bag and two Browning auto rifles and plenty ammunition."

They drove grimly away.

Two days later he amazed even his cold-blooded companion by driving into Dallas, then into West Dallas, his old home town, where thousands of eyes were on the alert for him. He went into an old building along the river front, came rushing out ten minutes later. He settled down at the wheel.

"It's all fixed, Suicide Sal," he grinned. "There's a guy in there that's gonna visit a pal in the Eastham pen tomorrow. He's gonna pack in word to Ray Hamilton that there'll be a load of guns waiting for him in the woods where a bunch of convicts are clearing off a lot of timber."

The machine, about the sixtieth that Clyde Barrow had stolen, swept through Dallas; masked in a fog, it raced on towards thick woods.

VI

THE same fog covered the road alongside of which Bonnie Parker and her bloody companion lay next morning behind a clump of brush. The car, parked down the road, could not be seen for the fog. Two Browning automatic rifles lay in the grass, one for Bonnie, the other for her Clyde. About a hundred yards away, at the edge of a clearing in the woods, a strip of white rag fluttered from the branch of a bush. Presently came the sound of shuffling feet. A moment later a dozen convicts scattered in the clearing and picked up axes.

"There's Ray," muttered Barrow. "Lookit him look." Hamilton bent his stooped shoulders, thrust a hand into the brush beneath the piece of white rag.

"He's got the gat," said Barrow. Four other convicts strolled over, bent and reached into the brush. Hamilton raised his gun and leveled it at a stout

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guard; the other four convicts covered a second. Hamilton's automatic spouted flame. The guard went down. In a running fire, Hamilton and the armed convicts ran for the highway.

"Get the car," Barrow cried at Bonnie. Hamilton and his companions stood in the road, firing, until the car's siren sounded and they bolted for it, joined by Barrow, who carried the Browning automatics.

They all piled into the car and Bonnie Parker whisked them away. Some distance away the escaped felons gripped Barrow's hand and got out to shift for themselves, while Clyde, spotting a convenient coupé parked alongside the road, got out with Bonnie and the arsenal—and his saxophone—and made for it. Bonnie drew a long cheroot from the roll of her red sweater, lit it and folded her arms.

In Lovelady, Texas, Clyde parked the car at the curb in front of a radio shop. The two sat listening.

A deep voice was bellowing from the loudspeaker. "Bloody Clyde Barrow has challenged the law for the last time . . ."

Bloody Clyde Barrow looked at Suicide Sal and grinned.

The deep voice went on: "Clyde Barrow and his killer moll will not and cannot get away with their raid of Eastham Prison. The five desperate men they snatched from us this morning are the last caged tigers they'll take out of a prison."

The voice was that of Lee Simmons, general manager of the Texas Prison system.

Bloody Clyde grinned again.

Simmons went on: "Clyde Barrow and his moll will pay for this outrage, and the man that will collect for the law is Frank Hamer. I think that every Texan knows what he can do."

Bloody Clyde sniffed. "Hamer—another over-rated bull."

He shifted gears and drove on.

Camped that night in the hills, Bonnie and Clyde were without a radio and if they had had one they would not have heard what was going on in Lee Simmons' office, where Frank Hamer sat listening to an indignant outburst from the prison manager.

In his stocking feet Hamer stands six feet two inches and weighs two hundred pounds. For twenty-seven years he had been a Texas Ranger. When they elected a woman Governor of Texas he quit the job. Now he was out to hunt a woman and her killer man. As a man hunter Texas had not produced better. Hamer was brought up in the same quick-draw country that the Bloody Barrows and Bonnie Parker had ravaged for three years.

Hamer pulled the brim of his hat down over his sharp eyes.

"Lee," he said to the prison manager, "this is a case of using the old wild horse stunt. You know how it's worked. You round up a batch of stallions and mares, close all the roads, except the one you want them to travel on, and then you get 'em to milling. The same stunt will get Barrow and his woman."

"By God, the boys in ten States have tried everything on them and haven't been able to close in on them!" Simmons shook his head.

"Yes, they have," said Hamer, "all except this old wild horse stunt. Barrow hasn't been in Louisiana, has he?"

"Not as far as we know."

"All right then, you let word get out that posses are covering every road out of Texas except the roads to Louisiana."

"I'll shoot out that by radio and the press right away."

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Hamer got up, started for the door.

"Where'll I get in touch with you?" Simmons asked.

"I'm going to get together a handful of my old buddies and go down into Louisiana," said Hamer. He went out.

CLYDE BARROW, his flaming moll beside him, listened again to the radio booming from the little shop in Lovelady. He heard Simmons again.

"The good people of Texas, I'm sure, will put up with the annoyance of having their cars stopped during the next few weeks at the State lines. The State has put posses at every road leading from this State into another. We know that this reckless killer, Barrow, and his gun-toting Borgia, who calls herself Bonnie, will, with the recklessness they have always shown, travel back over the roads they have terrified for the past two years."

Bloody Clyde grinned at Bonnie.

"He seems to have it in for you," he remarked.

"Maybe he's a woman hater."

Simmons boomed on: "So I ask the people of Texas to suffer this annoyance of having their cars stopped for the next few weeks."

"What a considerate guy," laughed Bonnie.

"Dumb as a wooden Indian," said Clyde. "I'll show him just how dumb he is. Thinks I'm going back over the old trail, eh? Well, I'll fix him. We'll shoot for a country where I haven't been since I was a kid. And you'll like it there, Sal. It'll be spring when we get there."

"Where?" asked Bonnie.

"A quiet little place where we can rest up. Gibsland—Louisiana. That's one country they don't think I'll go to."

So it was that the latest stolen machine bearing the pair shot southward when it left the little radio shop.

It was a fair May morning in 1934 when Bonnie Parker set eyes on the green meadows of Louisiana. The rear of the car was filled with guns and tin can fare, Clyde's saxophone and a box of cigars for Bonnie. Clyde wore dark-lensed glasses over his eyes, and Bonnie had forsaken her too well known red for a neat blue suit. It was spring and a new country to her; she thrilled at it and thought that when they got settled she could write more poetry.

Presently they whizzed past a white stone at the side of the road. Clyde saw a chiseled inscription on it—Bienville Parish—which led him to remark that they were not far from Gibsland. Soon they rushed past road markers pointing the road to Gibsland.

"It's a regular paradise along the lagoons around here," Clyde crowed. "They'll never in God's world think we're here."

"I haven't seen a single guy along the road that looked at us twice," said Bonnie.

Clyde grinned down at her.

"This is the one road they overlooked." Suddenly he applied the brake. "Hell!" he cried. A truck was halted on the road ahead of them. He swung the car to the shoulder of the road. Something hit the windshield and cracked it.

"Clyde, what's—" Bonnie cut off. Something splintered one of the dark lenses over Clyde's eyes.

He clapped his hand over it. "Bon-n-n—" Something caught him in the throat and he fell forward over the wheel.

"Cly—" Bonnie reached for a sawed-off shotgun in the rear seat.

A dozen leaden pellets caught her in the chest and face; the shotgun fell to

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her lap. She sank forward in a heap. Bullets crashed into the splintered windshield, sank into Clyde's body and ploughed into the car's metal body.

Out of a clump of brush ahead three men arose with guns in their hands. One was Frank Hamer. He came up to the car, opened its bullet-riddled door, saw the bleeding faces of Clyde Barrow and Bonnie Parker. He shook them. They were both dead. He turned to his two men.

"Boys, for the little chicken feed these two got in their wild rampage this is a terrible price to pay." He shook his head. "God, I hated to bust a cap on a woman, especially when she was sitting down, but it was her or us."

His two men stood silent, gazing down at Browning rifles and dozens of automatics piled on a bright, shining saxophone.

Bonnie Parker did not keep her rendezvous with Clyde Barrow. Though she had penned the lines:

> Some day they will go down together
> And they will bury them side by side,

in that fretful moment when Bloody Blanche came upon the scene, she was not buried beside Bloody Clyde. Her mother cried against it and her bullet-shattered body was lowered into a grave in old Fishtrap Cemetery, some distance from the spot where Clyde Champion Barrow joined his forbears.

IRENE SCHROEDER had long blonde hair and cold blue eyes and wore flowered skirts that didn't quite cover her bunchy knees. The good women of Wheeling, West Virginia, were shocked when she smoked on the street, but that wasn't anything to the way they shuddered at what followed. She trapped Glenn Dague, father of two children, and with him, and her own four-year-old boy, embarked on one of the bloodiest careers in criminal history. Howard McLellan tells the story in "The Iron Widow". Read it in DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY, November 24 issue, on sale November 14. Tell your newsstand dealer to save your copy!

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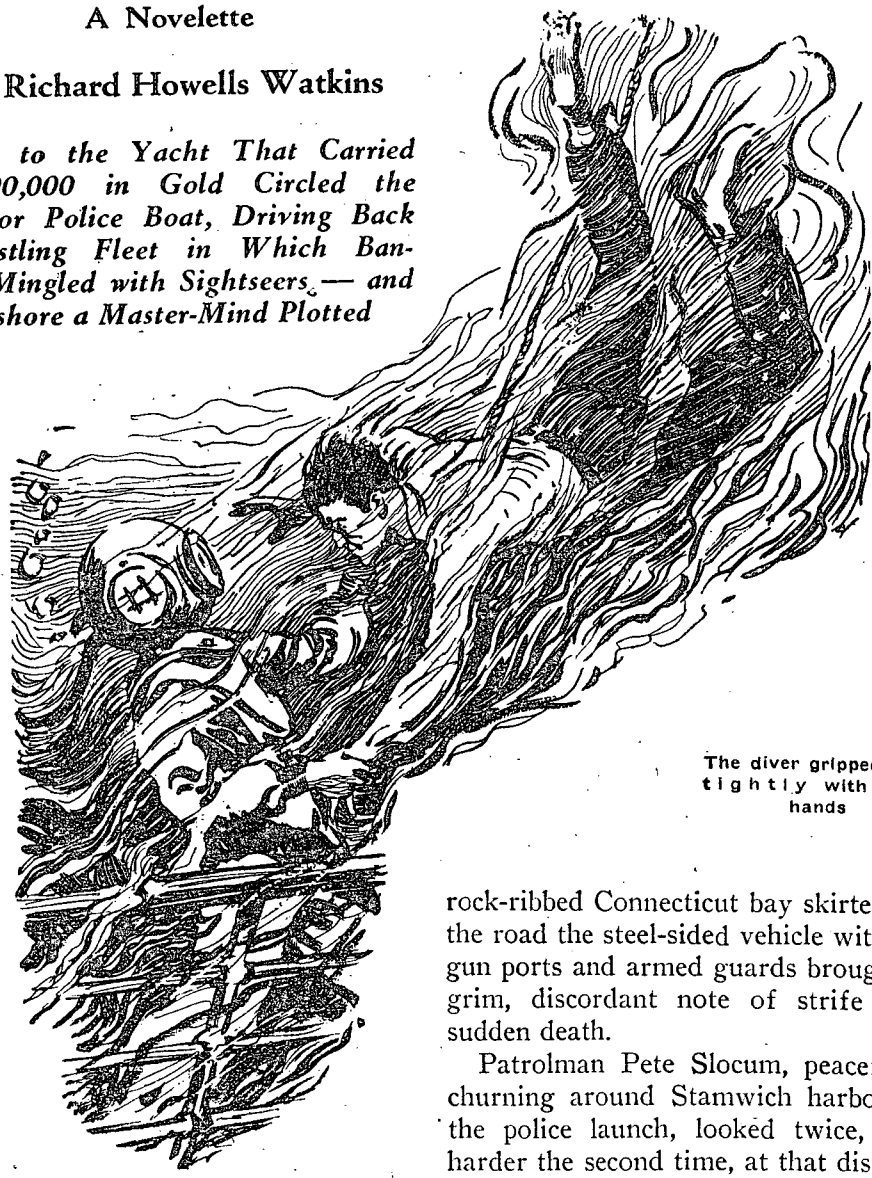
No Reward

A Novelette

By Richard Howells Watkins

Close to the Yacht That Carried $2,000,000 in Gold Circled the Harbor Police Boat, Driving Back a Jostling Fleet in Which Bandits Mingled with Sightseers — and Ashore a Master-Mind Plotted



The diver gripped him tightly with both hands

CHAPTER I

Guns Open the Ball

AN armored truck wound its way along the little-used Cove Road toward the gates of the huge Selby estate. Into the beautiful, rock-ribbed Connecticut bay skirted by the road the steel-sided vehicle with its gun ports and armed guards brought a grim, discordant note of strife and sudden death.

Patrolman Pete Slocum, peacefully churning around Stamwich harbor in the police launch, looked twice, and harder the second time, at that distant, formidable fortress on wheels. This was the first time on the harbor tour of duty that Pete had ever sighted an armored truck. He turned his wheel to starboard in a hurry and sent the launch ruffling through the narrow entrance of Selby Cove.

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As the cove opened up before the police boat, the harbor patrolman directed his course astern of the big, old-fashioned steam yacht Osceola, which had served the celebrated and wealthy Selby family for almost two generations. Captain Rasmussen, who had worked for the family almost as long, was on his bridge. He was staring shoreward at the armored truck. Close to the steam yacht, for deep water in the cove was limited, Pete Slocum passed a good-sized schooner, rigged fisherman style, swinging at anchor.

The cove road, practically a private thoroughfare, ended at the ornamental iron gates of the Selby estate. In front of these, while the launch was still two hundred yards from the pier, the truck halted.

Pete Slocum saw old Simon Young, the lodge keeper, come hobbling out of the ivied cottage to open the gates.

Of a sudden the big truck lurched into the air. Flames flashed up under it. The shattered vehicle crashed back to earth, toppling over on its side. The roar of a terrific explosion tore at Pete Slocum's eardrums and a puff of air fanned past his ears. Then a cloud of dust billowed up over the scene of swift destruction and blotted everything out of Pete's sight.

Swiftly he jerked open his throttle to the limit. With one hand on the wheel he pulled his revolver out of the holster. His face was grim.

The launch surged toward shore. Just before Pete ran it alongside the pier he caught a glimpse of two men in a small sloop—a racing Star—sailing close-hauled toward the curving beach of the cove a few hundred feet away. Possible help!

The breeze whirled away the dust screen. Pete, as he scrambled onto the pier, made out the overturned truck, the battered, leaning gates and four men closing in on the wreckage.

The four had emerged from a clump of bushes near the high wall of the Selby place at a safe distance from the point of the explosion. They gave no indication that they had seen the police launch; their faces were toward that scene of destruction.

Not a sound or a sign of life came from the truck.

Doubled up and running as noiselessly as he could, Pete sprinted down the pier. It was not a headlong charge into danger; his eyes raked the ground alertly for every possibility of cover or of reinforcement. Well he knew that he was in for a thin time, but he kept going.

None of the four was masked. That meant that they counted on leaving no witnesses.

Pete leaped off the shore end of the pier and into the nearest clump of bushes. As he dodged on he kept his eyes glued warily on a short, stocky fellow who gripped ready in his hands a peculiar-looking weapon that Pete knew was a sub-machine gun. Unless he got that man in a hurry he might as well quit.

The leading stickup man, who lugged a heavy tool kit with business-like briskness, reached the overturned truck. As he climbed up on it there was a sudden movement of the steel door of the driver's cab. An automatic roared thunderously within the vehicle. One, at least, of the guards still lived to hold the fort. The robber swayed.

"Great stuff!" muttered Pete.

HIS elation was checked by another pistol shot. A bullet snarled like an angry wasp through the leaves close to his head.

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Startled, he glanced around and spotted a fifth man, gun leveled, confronting him across the road. For just an instant, as he dived into cover, Pete saw his face—dark, with a twisted, deformed nose and glittering black eyes.

"Get at it, you guys!" this fellow yelled to the others.

When Pete stuck his gun and head out of the shrubbery the gunman had dropped back into ambush again. Not wasting a shot on this enemy on his flank, Pete crouched low and turned toward the truck and the machine gunner.

The confident man with the tool kit was now down in an untidy heap beside the truck. The other three were ringing it, all with weapons roaring. The sub-machine gun was ripping into the damaged, crumpled framework of the wreckage. The Tommy was hammering hard—perhaps had already wiped out that solitary defender.

Desperately Pete opened on the stocky fellow with the machine gun. The range was long, but his hand was steady and his finger on the trigger skillfully gentle.

Bullets from the man across the road slashed the bushes near him. Screened from direct sight, Pete paid no heed. He fired twice, carefully.

The man with the Tommy doubled up. Then he straightened and fell onto his back. The machine gun in his outflung hands thudded down on his stomach. He flattened out in the dust.

Almost at the same instant that Pete dropped the gunner he heard the sound of a shot from another quarter. It blared out further down the road, from the direction in which the truck had come.

The two thugs left standing near the shattered iron gates quit firing long enough to sweep road, truck and their prostrate fellows with startled glances. Another shot from Pete missed the target. Together they leaped behind the wreckage of the truck, cutting off Pete's chance of another hit. Their automatics rang out again. The guard inside the truck did not respond.

Pete swung around to confront the man in the bushes across the road. He caught no glimpse of him. Nor did the slightest movement of the green branches betray his location. While he scanned the foliage he filled his gun.

The whole face of the wall as far as Pete could see from the gates to the nearest turn in the road was masked by thick but bushy scrubs. The stick-up man might be lurking anywhere.

On Pete's side of the road, next to the cove, the cover was much scantier. Pete stuck his head out. He drew no fire. Dodging back, he bunched himself up into a crouch. At top speed he flung himself obliquely across the road. Desperately he charged toward the gates. Was he running head on into that hidden gunman with the twisted nose? His eyes blazed at the truck behind which the two killers had taken cover.

"Give 'em hell!" he roared, sending a shot crashing ahead of him. "Give 'em hell!"

CHAPTER II

A Most Mysterious Exit

LUCK does not always favor the brave, but a bold front does much to make enemies think their own fortunes are failing. The man in ambush did not open on Pete. Neither did the two behind the truck. Suddenly, as he approached with revolver ready, he saw that his enemies were in flight. They had run back and

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dodged through the iron gates, askew on their hinges and almost falling over. Pounding after them into the grounds of the estate, Pete caught a glimpse of a fleeing thug. He fired immediately.

The man was pelting at top speed close to the wall. Before Pete could fire again a slight bend in the masonry concealed him from sight.

Pete darted after him. He had run

PETE SLOCUM

only a few hundred feet when the sight of a gnarled apple tree with a lone branch dangling over the wall tempted him.

That evil-faced fellow who had lingered so cannily and so cunningly in the background was probably the leader of this attempt. He had not gone forward, toward the gate; therefore he had gone back, toward the sound of that mysterious shot. Better bag one leader than a dozen cheap cannons.

Pete holstered his revolver, swarmed up the tree and swung himself noiselessly onto the top of the wall.

As he glanced over he found himself looking down into the muzzle of an automatic in the hands of a white-clad man below him. Even as his own hand made a spasmodic move toward his revolver he recognized the other with a gasp of relief.

This was one of the two yachtsmen who had beached their sail boat after the explosion. Pete knew him well: Jay Connaught, cousin of the Misses Selby, marine biologist of some note, and fleet captain of the Stamwich Yacht Club. His bare-headed companion was Gregory Larch, Connaught's man of business and manager of his estate. He stood a bit behind his employer.

Connaught's gun came down as he recognized the sudden apparition on top of the wall. Pete saw that his shirt, under his left armpit, was reddened and dripping slightly.

"Any luck, Slocum?" the wealthy marine biologist asked coolly.

"Two of 'em are running through the grounds!" Pete reported. "Seen a fellow with a twisted nose? He's the leader."

Connaught shook his head. "Nary a kink—or a straight nose, either," he answered with unruffled calm. "But I tapped a lad back there in a sedan and took his gun—after he'd started using it on me. We'd better—"

Suddenly he stopped, with a heartfelt expletive. Their ears picked up the rasp of a starter and the answering throb of a motor.

"Didn't tap him hard enough!" Connaught shouted, breaking into a run. Pete rushed along the narrow top of the wall, ducking branches, heedless of a fall. Behind Connaught pelted Mr. Larch.

Pete caught sight first of a seven seater blue sedan. There was a man in the driver's place, another flinging open the door to enter, and one more

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dropping from the wall. He shouted and fired, though beyond effective range. His shot only speeded the fugitives; in another instant the car was surging down the road.

In time to save himself from decapitation by a low hanging bough Pete halted. He shouted down to the red-faced, panting Larch.

"Get to a telephone—at the Selby's or the Connaught place!" he commanded. "Call Chief Fowler—big blue sedan New York license—three men—"

"Driver with a swelling, unfortunately small, on the right side of his head," Connaught interrupted.

Larch shot off at top speed, heading after the car in the direction of the Connaught estate; which adjoined the Selby's and was nearer.

Pete looked down the length of the wall, toward the shattered Selby gates.

"There must be a fellow with a twisted nose down there in the bushes unless he's doubled back through the estate," he said. "You take the cove side of the road and I'll look down onto the shrubbery."

"Right!" Connaught agreed. "You're a nice easy target up there. Thank Heaven I'm thin and undulating."

"Cheer me up!" Pete Slocum growled. With eyes popping and every nerve alert he back-tracked along the wall. Below, on the edge of the cove, the lanky, easy-moving figure of Jay Connaught kept pace with the harbor cop.

NOTHING happened. Nobody fired; nobody broke cover. The man had vanished. They came to the armored truck.

Pete Slocum swung down off the wall.

"Sad!" remarked Jay Connaught. "The lad's gone through a trapdoor on us—or something. Sure you really saw him?"

His eyes, sharply inquiring in spite of his suavity, swept over the harbor cop in restrained, yet undoubted disparagement. Pete Slocum's weathered face did not change expression. If people wanted to think him dumb and tell other people about it, he never objected. A dumb cop has opportunities not given to a smart one, and Pete wasn't proud.

"Thought I saw him," he said mildly. "Seemed to me I did."

Connaught smiled, hardly turning his head aside.

"Eschew thought, Slocum," he advised. "It's not only painful but dangerous."

"Huh?" Pete's eyes were inquiring, not angry.

Connaught did not explain.

In silence Pete climbed up on the side of the overturned truck. The door on top was unfastened and he pulled it up.

There were two men inside, on what had been the driver's seat. One, the driver, was down at the bottom, huddled up around his wheel, dead. The other, with a wound through the neck, was upright, braced in position, with a hot automatic tucked under his arm. He held an unlighted cigarette in one hand and a packet of paper matches in the other.

His face was still tense; his head bent toward the cigarette. Plainly he had died from the wound in the neck or some other injury just after the robbers had fled.

"A good guy—and I wish he'd had one drag on that cigarette before he went out," Pete said soberly. "He opened on 'em to shoot it out after his

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buddies had been killed by the explosion."

Jay Connaught dropped back onto the road after a single glance.

"It wouldn't have done him much good not to have shot it out," he pointed out sarcastically. "I see old Simon's—ah—distributed, too."

It was then that Pete realized from unpleasant and sanguinary signs that the aged gatekeeper, Simon Young, had been blown to pieces by the force of the explosion. Unprotected by the armored body of the truck, he had suffered the full fury of the blast.

Connaught swung a white, canvas-shod foot toward a gaping hole in the road almost under the side of the truck.

"I'm no high explosive expert, but I'd say that they'd planted something brisk under the road right where the truck must pull up and—"

He stopped as he saw that Pete Slocum was following a couple of wires, torn up with the surface of the road. They led him through the shrubbery to a battery box at least a hundred yards from the gates. It was near the place where the dark-complexioned man with the twisted nose had lain in ambush. "I was right!" Pete muttered. "That fellow was the boss and brains of this job! But how he faded out is the queerest thing about this stickup!"

CHAPTER III

Two Nice Old Ladies

THE harbor cop stared hard at the handle, but did not put a finger on it. He came back by way of the road to avoid trampling on any foot-prints in the soft, damp earth under the bushes.

When he reached the gates he found an ornate black phaeton, spotless, glittering but obviously not of modern vintage, drawing up on the driveway inside the grounds. The top was down and two aged but upright ladies of precisely the same bony cast of countenance sat in the rear seat. The Misses Augustine and Penelope Selby, with glittering black eyes, looked through the shattered gates at the scene of carnage with unmoved faces.

"What have you been up to now, Jay?" demanded Miss Augustine irascibly. "I thought you were always busy with fish and clam shells."

"I've been losing blood in your service, Cousin Augustine—and a lot of good it will do me, too," retorted Jay Connaught. He waved a hand at the truck. "Some gentlemen have tried to—knock off, I believe the expression is—this little security box of yours by blowing it up."

Miss Augustine laughed—a laugh so deep that it seemed almost masculine to Pete Slocum. Her sister, in a slightly higher cackling note, echoed her mirth.

Miss Augustine ceased laughing and peered closely at the ground around the gate.

"Was that Young?" she inquired.

Jay Connaught nodded. "That was Simon Young."

"Hum!" said the old lady calmly. "Well, we're here today and gone tomorrow."

"Shocking!" Miss Penelope said with no great feeling. "Well—he didn't suffer."

Miss Augustine turned her beady eyes at Pete Slocum, who was getting the dead truck guards out of the front seat.

"Why wasn't that policeman wounded or killed, too?" she demanded suspiciously.

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"This is the harbor man," Jay Connaught explained. He leaned a little nearer the car and added tolerantly, in a lower voice, "The harbor hick."

Pete gave no sign that he had heard that casual and contemptuous remark.

"Arrived too late to be of any use, I suppose," Miss Augustine commented loudly. "Policemen always do. Jay, tell him to stand guard while

JAY CONNAUGHT

they're unloading the second truck and taking the—the contents aboard the yacht."

Pete Slocum looked blankly away from the withered, entirely composed face of this strange old lady. "It's better to be dumb than be tongue-lashed," he decided. "Wonder if this chauffeur or any other servant could have tipped off these stickups about the truck? There's a slight chance somebody inside passed the word about this shipment, whatever it is."

Miss Augustine now was regarding her cousin Jay.

"And just how did you happen to be shot—so slightly—in fighting these robbers?" she demanded.

Jay Connaught shook his head reproachfully at the two ladies.

"Your suspicions do your heads no credit, my sweet cousins," he said. "I suppose it's senility at last. This armored truck business points to something of the sort, too."

"Does it?" inquired Miss Augustine coldly.

Connaught nodded.

"I'll admit to you, dear cousin, my greed, dishonesty and murderous proclivities," he said. "Am I not also a descendant of Wolf Selby of Wall Street? But do you really think, ladies, that if I decided to rob you I wouldn't make a better stab at it than this?" His hand indicated the wrecked truck contemptuously.

Miss Augustine and Miss Penelope looked at each other in silence. Then, slowly, Miss Augustine nodded.

"He's right, Penelope," she croaked. "He's clever—cleverer than this, at least."

"Though not as clever as he thinks he is," Miss Penelope added.

"That would be impossible," Jay Connaught conceded carelessly.

The two ancient sisters consulted with eyes alone.

"THERE'S another truck coming," Miss Augustine announced. "We're going to board the Osceola. Jay, you and this policeman stay here and mind that you don't take your eyes off the guards. Have them load the—the contents in the tender. I've told Captain Rasmussen the launch is to make ten trips."

With the tip of her parasol she poked her chauffeur in the back.

"Help Mr. Connaught push that broken gate open for us," she commanded. "You, too, policeman!"

"Yes, madam," Pete Slocum said woodenly. His face was red with wrath at their slight sympathy for the

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murdered men, but he clung to his pose of stupidity. The chauffeur, a pink-faced Britisher, didn't look like a top-off, but you couldn't always tell.

Cheerily, Jay Connaught assisted Pete and the chauffeur to drag open the damaged iron gates.

"Why this sudden collection of valuables, Cousin Augustine?" he inquired, as the chauffeur climbed back into his seat. "Going a bit soft in the head or hard in the arteries?"

Miss Augustine thinned her lips grimly.

"You'll be better able to decide later, you shortsighted simpleton!" she said angrily. "With the country sure to go in more and more for inflation the dollar won't be worth five cents in six months!"

Miss Penelope's claw-like hand touched her withered arm in quick warning.

"Besides," Miss Augustine added lamely, with her eyes turning toward Pete Slocum, "we're not hoarding. We're just taking a few family trinkets of little value to the Osceola."

Jay Connaught laughed. "In ten loads!" he said softly.

Miss Augustine shot lightning at him and glanced warily at the policeman. But Pete's face showed no interest. He was up on the side of the truck, working on the crumpled steel body in an effort to see inside.

Jay Connaught laughed in disinterested amusement at the anger of Miss Augustine. "You ladies could cut the diamonds in your little trinkets without tools," he said. "And why not? If you weren't hard would you be true daughters of old Cub Selby, and grand-daughters of Wolf Selby himself?"

Miss Augustine, without a word, lifted her parasol to prod the chauffeur. But a sudden exclamation from Pete Slocum, who had been peering into the truck, halted her.

"There's another guard inside the truck body—dead!" he exclaimed. "But, ladies, the truck is empty!"

Again Miss Augustine laughed, and again Miss Penelope echoed her mirth.

"Of course it is, you idiot!" she rasped. "You've all been fighting over nothing—nothing! The gold's in the second truck!"

Gold!

CHAPTER IV

Explanation—and a Prophecy

THE dark-complexioned, black-eyed man with the twisted nose had dropped out of the vicinity of Selby Cove as if he had gone through the ground. Though Pete resumed his search it was soon interrupted. Chief Ben Fowler, in the four year old coupé supplied to the police by the parsimonious selectmen of Stamwich, came blaring along the winding road like something making a getaway from the infernal regions.

The chief, a barrel-chested old-timer with a face as long and hard as a whetstone, bounced out of the car. He raked the scene of the stickup with quick eyes and then turned his gaze distrustfully upon young Pete Slocum as he came running up.

Chief Ben Fowler never trusted any one, and Patrolman Slocum, in spite of his good work, had too much of the sailor about him to retain the chief's confidence.

Pete Slocum talked fast but economically. Fowler jerked his head as the harbor cop described the dark man with the twisted nose.

"You've been playing ball with Mat Dorn, a tough stickup as those cattle

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go," he said. "Mat's just smart enough not to have a gang—he keeps to four or five men who won't squeal if they're pinched."

"There were three men in the blue sedan with New York license—"

Fowler stopped Pete with a jerk of his hand.

"We've got the sedan—on the outskirts of Stamwich," he said. "Empty. We won't know what they're escaping in now until the fellow who was driving the car they jumped comes to. He took a crack on the head. But I want Mat Dorn."

He threw a glance down the road toward an approaching vehicle.

"Another armored truck coming—we passed it on the road," he said. "I left a couple of men in another car to follow it."

He swung around on Jay Connaught, who was standing by, leisurely readjusting the handkerchief on his bullet wound. Fowler's eyes rapidly took in the languid, willowy form of the proprietor of the third largest estate within the boundaries of wealthy Stamwich.

"What's this about gold, Mr. Connaught?" he demanded. "We're just local cops, but if we'd been notified—"

Jay Connaught chuckled. "I'm delighted to see you, myself," he said. "But the Misses Selby have somewhat belatedly lost confidence in the whole industry and government of the United States of America. It isn't likely, therefore, that they would trust such a small segment of it as the Stamwich police force."

"Maybe not, but we can pull a few triggers and that's all that's needed on holdup men," Ben Fowler snapped. "Just what's the shipment in these two trucks?"

Leisurely Jay Connaught reflected, unmoved by the impatience of the fuming chief. "I'll tell you," he decided. "It's no skin off my tender back if it does come out.

"The family suspects with good reason that the Selby sisters, who control more of the family wealth than any other twenty of us combined, have been selling land, stocks and bonds and gathering gold, law or no law, from unscrupulous dealers, and also various trinkets like precious stones, platinum, and so forth."

"How much?" Chief Fowler interrupted while Pete Slocum, to emphasize his stupidity, let his mouth sag widely open.

"Very little, comparatively," Connaught replied. "But enough to rouse groans of anguish among the more greedy kinsmen—something between two and three millions, as well as we can estimate it. Doubtless the sisters are planning to take the stuff with them on the Osceola to one of their foreign residences. They have a villa at Cap d'Ail on the Riviera, a Devonshire place, and smaller houses in Rome, Paris and Stockholm. In some such safe place they plan to take refuge when Bolshevism overwhelms the United States."

AGAIN he laughed softly, in cynical amusement. "There isn't one of the Selby clan who dares to protest aloud," he said. "The Misses Augustine and Penelope aren't interested in philanthropies. They never would let the money get out of the family. But they can always juggle their wills around to leave out any relative whom they particularly dislike."

"And how do you stand with the ladies?" Chief Fowler asked abruptly.

Jay Connaught smiled sardonically.

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"I'm their favorite—because I handle 'em without gloves," he said with no hesitation. "Impoliteness pays with my dear cousins. They wouldn't trust me to mail a letter for 'em for fear I'd steal the stamp, but even so I'm overwhelmingly ahead of the rest of the outfit in their esteem and confidence. Fortunately I've a bit of money of my own and a hobby of my own so I can afford to risk their disfavor by using my own system."

He nodded in a sort of ironic satisfaction. "Guile!" he said. "Deep stuff! Here's my program, Chief: I insult them upon every occasion and admit that I'd loot them if I ever got a chance. It makes 'em think I may be honest."

Pete Slocum examined unwinkingly this appallingly frank and satirical gentleman.

The second armored truck squealed to a halt near the wreckage of the first. A car with a couple of town detectives on board halted behind it.

Three hard-visaged guards leaped from the truck to the ground, gun hands close to their holsters. Although the chief had told them what to expect they looked ugly enough as they saw the bodies of their dead fellows.

"This looks like a violation of the gold-export law to me," Chief Fowler said suddenly. "But that's for the Federals to worry about."

He turned toward the guards. "Get that stuff aboard the yacht and get it aboard now! I'm not going to have this truck stand here until every crook east of Chicago and north of Miami pulls into town."

With a blunt, imperative finger he indicated the pier and then rapidly led the way toward it. Already the launch which had conveyed the Misses Selby to the Osceola was coming back to the pier with a ruffle of white water at her bow.

The immaculate Gregory Larch spoke up.

"I telephoned Jenkin at the garage for a car, sir," he said to Jay Connaught, looking at the blood on his employer's shirt. "But if you're feeling faint, perhaps—"

"The only thing that would make me feel faint would be an expression of gratitude from my sweet old cousins," Connaught broke in. "I want you to get the Star off the beach, Greg. Sail her around the point to the boathouse."

He took a step closer to the sandy-headed young harbor cop and spoke in a low voice, devoid of his usual flippancy:

"You'll be busy with sightseers and suspicious characters when the news comes out on Page One, Slocum."

Pete Slocum nodded. "I'll be busy," he agreed.

"I may be able to help you, then," Connaught said. "If anything turns up that you should know I'll hang a green light or pennant on the forestay of the Sea Quest." He pointed to the trim schooner that rode at anchor close to the big Osceola. "I'll be busy aboard her for quite a while fitting her out as a marine laboratory for a West Indian expedition—a little research on the bottom. Come to me on board. Or look for me at my boathouse around the point if I display a signal there."

"Right, Mr. Connaught!" said Pete, with satisfaction. "That's a good idea. Not having a radio I'm hard to reach in a hurry when I'm patrolling the harbor."

The marine biologist clutched the harbor cop by the shoulder as a huge gleaming limousine driven by Jenkin,

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one of the Connaught chauffeurs, whirled up.

"Unless I'm softening up in the head, Slocum, that wad of gold and jewels worth two or three millions isn't going to be as safe on the Osceola as your chief thinks," he predicted softly. "Mark my words, there'll be more hell raised and more blood spilled in this harbor!"

CHAPTER V

What Came of Defiance

WITH more than a flicker of amusement Jay Connaught, comfortably asprawl in a leather armchair in the huge library of his Stamwich house, contemplated his secretary that night. Against the background of books and numerous marine trophies the blond, slender young cousin of the Misses Selby looked more like a student than a man of action.

Gregory Larch stood in front of his employer and fiddled with his brandy glass. It had been refilled more than once since dinner.

"You know I'm not yellow, Mr. Connaught," he muttered. Though his utterance was low it was quite distinct. "But the Misses Selby ordered a dozen operatives from two well-known New York detective agencies—keen rivals, sir. They arrived less than an hour ago, and the ladies plan to set them against each other, to insure the utmost vigilance. And besides these, there are the Selby servants."

"And doubtless a stray newspaperman or two, as well, can be found at the Selby gates or besieging the Selby yacht in a small boat?"

"There are scores of them, sir!"

Jay Connaught chuckled. "Think of it!" he murmured.

"You are mad to take the slightest step in—the matter!" Gregory Larch insisted, almost tremulously. His body swayed a trifle; he drained his glass.

"You and I would be mad not to take steps," Jay Connaught replied. "What's worrying you is that it isn't as refined to go to the penitentiary for a rough robbery as it is for forgery, embezzlement and grand larceny."

At the mention of "penitentiary" Gregory Larch's white countenance took on a perceptible tinge of yellow.

"Be a realist, Greg!" Jay Connaught exhorted him. "Thanks to your skill as a penman and my own reputation for wealth we've skimmed thin ice for three years. But nothing will prolong our freedom for a week longer except money in fairly large quantities. Isn't that true?"

Gregory Larch licked his lips; nodded, and then spoke:

"Even a million dollars would put us on the road to recovering everything, meeting those forged—those obligations and—avoiding ruin. But—but it's impossible to get it!"

"Easiest thing in the world," replied Jay Connaught confidently. "I'll admit this low-grade moron Mat Dorn has changed my plans by so unexpectedly trying to crash in on my cousin's hoard. But I intend to turn that to account; in fact, my new stunt is much better than my old one."

For an instant, moving comfortably in the big chair, he contemplated the magnificent ceiling. Then he nodded.

"My previous plan would have left the police with a mystery and no arrests. That means they would keep pecking at the case. My new idea includes a complete and triumphant solution of the crime by the police and the creation of a police hero whose picture will be in every newspaper in

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the East. Peter Slocum, patrolman extraordinary and detective without peer! The harbor hick!"

Gregory Larch stared hard at his master.

"But—but just suppose this police hero of yours disclaims the credit?" he demanded.

"Don't be silly," Jay Connaught reproved. "How can he? He'll be dead."

EYE to eye the man in the leather armchair and the man in front of him contemplated each other. Fifteen seconds drifted soundlessly past on the ornate electric clock on the mantle. Then, from a rusty throat, Gregory Larch spoke. His body was not swaying now; it was stiffly upright.

"He won't be dead," he said, and put down his glass. "I'm a crook—a weakling—a mess. But I'll not be a murderer. And I'll save you from that fate, too, Jay Connaught, if—"

Suddenly Larch swung around and headed abruptly for the door.

"Wait!" said the yachtsman quietly.

Larch moved resolutely on.

He had not taken two steps more before Jay Connaught had launched himself out of the armchair. Without the slightest sound he hurled himself at his secretary. His right arm, upraised, came down upon the back of Larch's head. In the fingers of that hand a strange weapon was clutched tightly.

There was something horribly controlled about that blow. It was not delivered with the mad violence of a man in a passion; it was a calculated, measured stroke, but it cracked Gregory Larch's skull and instantly ended his life, nevertheless.

Jay Connaught caught the man as he fell forward. Supporting the drooping body he dragged it toward the empty fireplace. He placed it there, with head close to one of the massive wrought iron andirons.

With quick, steady fingers Jay Connaught picked up the weapon he had used to kill Larch. It was the great iron ball which had formed the ornamental top of one of the heavy andirons. He screwed it into place, wiped it with his handkerchief and then made sure by raising the body of Larch that his position was the natural one which would be assumed by a body falling heavily backward upon that massive piece of iron.

Still working with precision, Connaught picked up the dead man's glass by the rim with his handkerchief, filled it, spilled a few drops of brandy on the man's shirt and dropped the glass on the hearthstone close to his fingers.

He stepped back, looked over the scene of that "accident" with keen, critical eyes, and then glanced at the clock. It was twelve minutes past eleven.

"No weak sisters need apply, Greg," he murmured softly. "Especially weak sisters who know as much as you do."

He turned out the two lamps in the huge room and softly left by the door out into the hall. When not entertaining Jay Connaught was easy on his servants; the butler and the rest of his staff had retired long since.

Rapidly but without a sound he made his way upstairs to his own room. He picked up a flashlight. Stepping into his bath room, he selected a small bottle from among the many in the medicine closet, together with a hypodermic needle in a case. Then he descended the stairs, took a gray topcoat from the coat closet, donned it

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and left the house by a side door leading out into the starlit terrace.

His light patent leather shoes made little noise as he cut across the dark, well-kept lawn that sloped toward Stamwich harbor. Avoiding the driveway, he walked to the corner of the estate bordering on that of the Selby sisters and on the cove road. In the stone wall there was a door which he opened without fumbling. He crossed the cove road to a two-story boathouse built out on the rocky and rugged shore over the water of a small basin.

In this tiny harbor, much too confined and shallow for the Gloucester fishing schooner, were moored the Star, another larger racing sloop, and a couple of speed boats.

Jay Connaught's business was with the boathouse. He opened the door on the land side, and with his flashlight carefully screened by his hand, made his way past a few dinghies to a flight of wooden stairs in one corner of the big room.

As he started up these a man came down them from above.

CHAPTER VI

"I Want Them Alive!"

CONNAUGHT'S shielded light revealed vaguely a squat, misshapen body and arms that seemed strangely long by contrast. The man's face was mottled and bulbous of feature.

"Standin' by, sir," the mis-shapen boatman said in a suppressed growl. "What's the word?"

For a moment the yachtsman did not answer. He examined this creature of his attentively by the light of his flashlight, as he had examined Gregory Larch.

Bart Lusk narrowed his eyes, but did not blink. He stood still on the stairs, long arms dangling; powerful fingers half crooked. His unpleasant face was slightly wrinkled, as if his dull mind were concentrated upon hearing the commands of his master.

His scrutiny satisfied Jay Connaught. "There is more in this than chicken feed for you, Bart," he said. "But it isn't as simple as our last job together—just getting rid of a kid we hit in the speedboat. It means obeying orders and keeping your mouth shut. Understand?"

"Sure!" muttered Bart Lusk. "Only—get this, boss."

He came down a step and spoke in a husky whisper:

"I ain't standin' still an' lettin' some dick take me if things go wrong. They got two convictions hung on me now, like you know. Anybody that tries to pinch me—well, he won't be healthy. I'm tellin' you now."

"I applaud your frankness and determination," Jay Connaught replied mockingly. "Such sterling resolution should take you far."

Bart Lusk's overhanging brow wrinkled in perplexity. "Huh?"

"Jake with me, Bart," Connaught explained. "If they get gay we'll let 'em have it. No weak sisters need apply. Small risks and big jack."

"Now I get you," the boatman said. "What do we do?"

"You follow me—and don't make any noise about it," Connaught replied and turned toward the door. He switched off his flashlight.

Noiselessly as Jay Connaught set his course from the boathouse along the grass beside the cove road, the squat man at his heels was even more silent. In that powerful but clumsy-looking body dwelt the talent for quiet movement of a great cat.

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Before they had gone far in the direction of the Selby estate light broke in upon the darkness. Although it was nearly midnight, the gold-laden steam yacht Osceola was brilliantly illumined. Her port-holes were circles of yellow light; her decks were as bright as day. And from her bridge a searchlight, glaring whitely in contrast with the less powerful electric lamps, revolved slowly.

The turning light dwelt briefly upon Connaught's Gloucester fishing schooner, motionless, with two yellow sparks—mere kerosene lanterns—in her rigging. It swept on, picking up on the surface of the cove scattered small motor and rowboats.

Most of the small craft were quite plainly the vessels of inquisitive sightseers, attracted to that small segment of Stamwich harbor by the drama of gold and sudden death.

The Selby estate pier was strung with lights, and by their gleam Jay Connaught made out that the near-by gates of the Selby grounds had been dragged together again and now were guarded by a couple of dark figures. His attentive eyes located, among other things, Pete Slocum's old police launch tied up at the Selby landing stage.

"The ladies are taking no chances," he murmured in cool appraisal. "At least they think they are not."

"We can't pull nothin' around here," the squat boatman whispered with sour conviction. "The whole place must be crawlin' with dicks an' flatties."

"Our small job is just on the edge of things," Connaught replied. "Follow!"

Crouching, he descended the little slope, keeping midway on the bushy, narrow tract between the road and the edge of the cove. Near the bottom he stopped abruptly, with a hand thrust back to halt Lusk. He peered through the bushes toward a small, square shanty that stood outlined against the lighted cove.

It was a tumbledown lobsterman's shack, of warped, collapsing boards, not used even for the storage of pots for twenty years or more. The Selby sisters had seen to that, having no liking for squatters on their land. The strange thing was that it had been permitted to stand there on the salt-swept margin above the high-tide mark.

After an instant of reconnoitering Jay Connaught started forward. But almost immediately he stopped again, listening.

To his ears had come subdued sounds. They emanated from the shanty itself. It was as if some one within were tumbling about in some sort of struggle. Connaught smiled in thin-lipped satisfaction.

But of a sudden the smile died and his eyes switched from the hut to a shadow near it. His hand, back stretched, pressed upon Bart Lusk's broad forearm, commanding silence and immobility.

THE dark shadow was abruptly transformed into a distinct silhouette as the rays of the Osceola's turning searchlight, piercing the bushes, fell on it. Plainly the men in hiding made out the alert figure of Patrolman Pete Slocum with his revolver drawn and ready.

It was evident that the harbor cop, too, had heard the sounds from within the shanty. Mat Dorn had vanished on foot when his men had fled in the blue sedan; if he had not penetrated the cordon flung about this part of Stamwich by Chief Fowler he must

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still be in hiding. Pete Slocum had not yet abandoned his stubborn search.

Jay Connaught touched Bart Lusk on the shoulder and then, slowly, placed his hand around the windpipe of the squat boatman. He squeezed gently and motioned toward the harbor cop. Soundlessly he crept toward him. As he moved he pulled a small automatic from his coat pocket and held it in his left hand.

Bart Lusk drew up beside his master. Together they slipped behind the engrossed young harbor policeman.

Bart Lusk's big arms spread; his fingers hooked. Then, with a leap, he was upon Pete Slocum. His right arm swung around Slocum's neck, darting like a snake at his windpipe.

Jay Connaught moved just as fast, though his part was a minor one. As Lusk's long, powerful fingers closed on the harbor cop's throat his own fingers, with a lightning thrust and steel-like grip, plucked the revolver out of Slocum's hand.

It was all over in an instant. From Pete Slocum's throat came strangled, gurgling sounds, but those long, terrible fingers were squeezing life as well as breath out of him. A shout was impossible.

Bart Lusk was down on top of him. His squat body overwhelmed the wiry, slender harbor patrolman as a lion might crash down a leopard. And his fingers, digging deeper and deeper into Pete's neck, had in them all the unleashed ferocity of a lion's fangs.

Pete Slocum's desperate writhings grew less violent. Consciousness left him. Not for an instant, as his victim's body relaxed, did Bart Lusk ease his throttling grip.

As coolly as a doctor bending over a patient Jay Connaught dropped to his knees beside the harbor cop, pulled out his torch and with fingers shading the light directed a tiny beam upon the unconscious man's face. He studied that distorted countenance and waited patiently. At last he tapped Lusk upon the shoulder. The boatman, blood lust aroused, did not release his hold till Connaught's own fingers ripped his from Pete Slocum's throat.

"I want him alive, blast you!" Connaught murmured. Lusk snarled at him as he reluctantly gave over.

From within the hut not the slightest sound was now to be heard.

Connaught pointed toward the cop. "Watch him!" he commanded, as to a dog, and Bart Lusk crouched beside Slocum's body.

Jay Connaught extinguished his light, moved a step to the door of the shanty and, with the greatest caution, let a small circle of light from his torch fall upon the dry, weathered boards of the door.

The place seemed securely padlocked with a rusty lock that no key could possibly turn. That look of long abandonment had secured the place from search that afternoon.

But though the lock was rusted beyond all springing, Jay Connaught plucked away the staple from the screws that, presumably, held it in place. With slow and careful hands he swung the door open a crack. Then, after a single flash of his light within, he opened it more widely, stepped inside and closed it after him.

CHAPTER VII

How to Make a Crook Talk

CONNAUGHT'S torch flung a ring of light upon the prostrate form of a man bound hand and foot with an old piece of two inch rope. A gag, of the same thick manila,

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had been worked askew by the captive's mouth. There was dried blood on one side of the man's head. The light revealed a convulsed dark face, vengeful black eyes and a deformed, twisted nose.

"What's the idea?" the bound man rasped out of the free corner of his mouth, but there was more fear than rage in his throat. Slit-eyed, blinded, he glared into the steady light of the torch.

"It's a good idea," Jay Connaught assured him with ironic politeness. "I'm delighted that although I hadn't time to make a good job of it you're still pretty well trussed up."

He bent suddenly and pulled the gag back into Mat Dorn's mouth.

The gunman snapped at him like a wolf, but his teeth failed to reach Connaught's hand. An instant later his jaws were too securely fastened to do more than work in unavailing fury upon the tightened gag.

Swiftly Jay Connaught gripped the thug by his arms and flung him up onto his shoulder. He stepped to the door, opened it and dropped Dorn none too lightly on the grass outside. Lusk still maintained his vigil over Pete Slocum.

Reëntering the hut, Connaught took up a rotting bit of a burlap bag and dusted all footprints from the floor save part of one print of Dorn's foot, near the door, which he carefully preserved. Then he came out, replaced the rusty staple and touched Bart Lusk on the shoulder.

"Carry him!" he commanded softly. The squat boatman picked up Dorn's twisting body in his arms as if the man were an infant. He waited a moment while Connaught made an inspection of the threshold and of the motionless policeman. Beyond all doubt Pete Slocum was still unconscious.

When his master turned from the hut Bart Lusk voiced an indignant protest:

"Ain't you goin' to finish that blasted harbor flattie?"

"Silence!" Soft as it was, the tone of that order closed Bart Lusk's jaw like an uppercut. He followed, crouching, as Jay Connaught led the way to the top of the point of land.

For just an instant, motioning Bart Lusk on toward the boathouse with his burden, Jay Connaught halted there. His eyes roved thoughtfully over the cove, resting longer on his own dark schooner Sea Quest than on the brilliantly lighted, richly laden steam yacht of the Selby sisters moored so close to it.

Slowly he nodded his head and then swung around and quietly took the lead back to his boathouse.

Once within the shelter of that building Bart Lusk dropped the wriggling gunman to the floor and prodded him with his foot.

"Lay still or I'll help ya!" he warned.

"Release the gentleman's gag, Bart," Jay Connaught commanded.

He took his seat in a deck chair with his flashlight trained on the man on the floor in front of him.

"How can I get in touch with the lad who gives the orders to your little group when you aren't around, Mr. Dorn?"

"I'll see ya in hell first!" Mat Dorn blazed. "Who are you? What you trying to pull here? Are you a dick, or—what is this?"

Jay Connaught answered not a word. He drew from his pocket the hypodermic needle and the bottle which he had brought from his bath

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room, and with care and deliberation began to load the needle. The white ray from the torch, which he balanced on his knee, fell like a spotlight upon the gleaming needle. Dorn's eyes dwelt upon it in fearful fascination.

"What's that?" demanded Mat Dorn. "What you up to? God, can't you talk?"

JAY CONNAUGHT did not reply. Despite Dorn's questions, repeated again and again in a rising voice, he continued his preparations. His captor's silence, the dread possibilities of that needle, his own utter helplessness, ate like an acid into Mat Dorn's sullen resistance.

When, at last, Jay Connaught spoke it was to Bart Lusk:

"Roll up his sleeve."

"For God's sake, don't poison me!" Dorn begged. "Don't stick that thing in me!"

"I haven't said this was poison," Jay Connaught said mildly. "Sorry you won't talk."

"I'll tell—God, yes, I'll tell if you put that thing away!" Dorn croaked. "What d'ya want to know? I'll spill everything!"

"Kind of you," murmured Jay Connaught. "Name of your lieutenant?"

"Jim Massey's the only one o' them I ever leave anythin' to but the gat work."

"And where can you reach him?"

Mat Dorn cast his eyes toward the gleaming needle; then spoke hurriedly.

"He hangs out at a hotel—the Endor—on Fifty-Sixth Street."

"Excellent!" Jay Connaught said pleasantly. "If it's a hotel it will have a telephone. This boathouse has a telephone. You can ring him up for me, and give him a message."

Mat Dorn licked his lips.

"You needn't if you don't feel like it," Connaught said soothingly.

"All right," muttered Dorn.

Briskly Jay Connaught emptied the needle back into the bottle. Then he nodded toward one of the big lockers that held boat gear.

"Stow him in that one, Bart, but gag him first. Then get him some grub. He can do his telephoning tomorrow morning."

He looked down at the bound gunman.

"Stick with me and you'll wear jewelry, son. Go against me and you'll wear electrodes. Take him away, Bart."

The squat boatman obeyed without ceremony. Then he came back to his master.

"What kind o' jewelry will that heel wear?" he demanded jealously.

Jay Connaught smiled. "A halo," he said. "Watch him, Bart. He's the lad who'll get the credit—after death—for a brilliant operation in finance conducted by me."

Bart Lusk nodded wisely. "The fall-guy, huh?" he said.

"One of them," replied his master. "You half-killed the other one this evening."

Bart Lusk shuffled his feet tentatively, turning to stare at the locker where he had shoved the holdup man.

"Wouldn't that bird be tucked away safer if ya stowed him away in the schooner, with Hillig sittin' on his neck?"

Jay Connaught trained his eyes and his flashlight on the mottled face of his man.

Bart rubbed his forearms uneasily. "Hillig's in on this, ain't he?" he muttered. "Puttin' Dorn on the boat was just an idear I had, boss."

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"Don't have any more," Connaught warned him coldly. "Dorn stays here—in your custody. If the police trace him here your story is that you caught him yourself and were holding him till the ladies offered a reward for his capture. Can you get that through your skull?"

"A swell alibi!" Lusk said with relief. "Holdin' out till they come through with a reward, huh? That way I don't have to knock off cops if they come musclin' in here."

"I'll tell you when we start knocking off cops," Connaught retorted. "You may not have long to wait."

He left the boathouse. For an instant he paused outside, looking up over the wall at the black outline of his ornate mansion on the rising hillside. Not a light showed in that huge, silent building where a dead man still awaited discovery in the library.

Turning away, he again took the path up over the base of the Point. He halted at a place in the bushes where he could look once more at the lights and activity of Selby Cove.

The mask of the casual, indifferent gentleman was off. Jay Connaught looked, with unrestrained, blazing covetuousness upon the treasure ship Osceola.

"It's as good as mine—right now!" he muttered. "You guard against guns, not brains, my sweet cousins!"

CHAPTER VIII

The Unknown

THERE were crooks in Stamwich—stickup men, sneak thieves, confidence men, even salesmen of gilt-edge securities worth every cent it cost to print them. And more were coming by every train. Chief Fowler, an unhappy old cop, knew it and had Stamwich's full force out on the streets and near the cove.

Irresistible to wrong ones of every type were the flaming headlines in the newspaper. A hoard of millions in easily negotiable form, owned by two old and presumably senile ladies. Who wouldn't make a play for it, whether with a blackjack or a pleasing tenor voice? The crooks came in, and Chief Fowler dripped many drops of cold sweat. Anything might happen.

Pete Slocum reported about noon in a faint croak that he was fit for duty. The chief tried to believe him. The harbor cop's neck was swollen, inside and out, and the blue bruises left by a huge unknown hand stood out like wounds on his brown throat.

"Clue!" he whispered, as Chief Fowler glowered at his sorry-looking neck. "Only clue we've got. The size of the hand that throttled me."

Fowler muttered something and answered his clamorous telephone. He hung up with a heartfelt expletive.

"Federal attorney," he said. "He's applying for a court order forbidding the departure of the Osceola from Stamwich harbor with the stuff on board. That means the lawyers will be slinging briefs around for months in a legal battle, leaving me sitting here with the gold in my lap. The worst break I could get!"

Pete Slocum fidgeted. "I'd like a look by daylight at that shack where I was throttled, sir," he urged.

With a grunt Chief Fowler reached for his dusty gray hat.

"If they haven't swiped the launch I'll ride down to the cove with you. Medical examiner's going to meet me at Connaught's place to look at that drunk who cracked his skull falling against an andiron. Gregory Larch, Connaught's secretary."

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They walked down to the town dock together, with the chief skewering newspapermen and photographers with his resentful eyes and chewing hard on his iron-gray mustache. Pete got the police boat moving in a hurry.

Even before they saw the funnel and slender masts of the Osceola over the arm of the cove it was apparent that part of Stamwich harbor was well filled with boats.

As they chugged into the cove Chief Fowler's morose eyes took in four men of his own force in two rowboats pulling slowly around the white sides of the yacht. The Misses Selby had been emphatic in their refusal to permit Stamwich policemen on board the Osceola, pointing out to the chief that, according to the newspapers, most policemen were criminals themselves.

Big Captain Rasmussen was clinging doggedly to his bridge, as if his command were running through a spell of heavy weather. A dozen men of the crew were on deck, working at tasks that plainly were manufactured to keep them in view of possible raiders. Of the Misses Selby themselves there was no sign. Around the yacht, in a wider circle than that made by the the perspiring policeman, patrolled a tender manned by two men of the yacht and two formidable-looking detectives. This motorboat gave scant clearance to sightseers' craft.

"She looks hard to crack, but you can't trust these crooks not to pull a fast one," Chief Fowler muttered.

In contrast with the brisk animation of the Osceola's deck, one man—Hillig, the lone watchman—was visible on Jay Connaught's Gloucester schooner.

The sailor, a tall, square-shouldered blond with a flat face, was sitting on the fore hatch leisurely patching a pair of dungaree trousers and letting his head swivel at intervals around the cove.

Unchallenged by a couple of lounging private detectives Pete put the police launch alongside the landing stage of the Selby pier.

Chief Fowler scowled at the dicks, scowled toward the wrecked iron gates, upon which several mechanics were at work, and stalked down the cove road in the direction of Jay Connaught's place, where a simple accidental death was to use up his valuable time.

As soon as he had made fast the launch Pete Slocum moved as rapidly as his weakish legs would permit to the shack among the bushes near the cove.

HIS recollection of what had occurred on the previous night was decidedly vague. He had heard a subdued noise inside the shack. Then some one—or more than one—had come down on him out of the blackness like a meteor out of the sky. During his struggle against those powerful, throttling fingers he had seen nothing and heard nothing that would help him.

A few feet from the shack he halted, not without a wary glance around him. The rusty padlock was in place on the weathered door, securely fastening together both parts of the staple. He thrust out a hand and plucked away the staple and the screws that should have held it firmly in the rotting wood.

He hunted for a hole or loose board in the side wall through which a man inside the shack could reach out and replace the staple. But he found nothing. He stood still, absently fingering his bruised throat.

"None of Mat Dorn's gang that we saw could have helped that guy," he muttered. "They were doing sixty

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down the road. It must have been Mat Dorn inside. He's got somebody else playing along on his side. It could be anybody in the household of the Selby sisters—possibly the one who tipped him off."

He considered the remote possibility that the elegant and casual Jay Connaught could have been in the game. But Connaught had played an important part in foiling the robbery. There was nothing phony about the attack on Dorn's getaway car.

Another thought rose in his mind to puzzle him. What was that subdued thumping noise he had heard in the shack? And if those sounds had been made by Mat Dorn who was it who had jumped him outside?

Pete examined the inside of the hut. All he could make out of the smoothed dirt floor, with the single, half-effaced footprint, was that somebody had wished to conceal what had been going on in the shack. Yet that footprint stood out conspicuously enough right on the threshold. It didn't make sense.

That footprint, as he could tell by its dimensions and certain other characteristics, came from the shoe of Mat Dorn. He had found others like it near the battery box in the bushes.

"There's some one—or maybe more than one—in this," he told himself, eying the smoothed floor. "And that some one combines rough stuff"—he touched his bruised neck—"with more craft than an ordinary thug."

CHAPTER IX

"Duck!"

HE turned back and made for his boat. As he was letting go the stern mooring line he paused to look out into the cove. A rowboat was coming toward the pier, rapidly propelled by the swinging arms and bending back of Hillig. In the sternsheets of the boat lounged the slender figure of Jay Connaught himself. The marine biologist raised a hand to Pete Slocum, as if asking him to wait.

Pete held his line, waiting with a wooden face. The rowboat swept alongside the landing float and Jay Connaught stepped out.

"Saw you running in to the cove, but I was below at the time, Slocum," he said with a nod toward his schooner. "Would you like to round up the three members of Mat Dorn's little group who got away from us?"

"Show 'em to me!" Pete Slocum croaked. "Those three? No other? Where are they?"

"Not Dorn—just his underlings," Jay Connaught replied. "Don't turn your head. Out of the corner of your eye you should be able to see a small gray motor boat with a black trunk cabin among that bunch of sightseeing boats near the entrance to the Cove."

Pete Slocum nodded. "It's Charlie Cogswell's old wreck," he said. "He rents it out to fishermen by the hour or day. Are they—"

"You've deduced it, officer," Jay Connaught broke in. "Unless my eye for unpleasant mugs is all shot I saw the three men aboard her scrambling into that blue sedan yesterday after the holdup. Perhaps they've come to look over the lay before making another shot at the loot. Can we get 'em?"

"We can," Pete Slocum asserted as emphatically as his swollen throat would permit. "This launch isn't fast, but I can beat that thing of Charlie's."

"They're not far from the shore," Jay Connaught warned. "If they got suspicious they could beach her and escape before we—"

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"They're not going to get suspicious," Pete said. "They saw two men come into the cove in this launch; they won't think anything of it if two men leave in it. We ought to be able to handle three gunmen. Get aboard. I've got a spare revolver for you."

"Fair enough," said Jay Connaught coolly, stepping into the old police boat. "You get the idea with startling rapidity."

Pete headed the launch toward the cove entrance at no more than half speed. Through lowered lids he looked intently at the gray motor boat. By the puffs of smoke from her exhaust the engine was running, but the boat itself rocked idly in the small harbor waves. She was not far inside the points of land that ran out on either side of the cove and only a few hundred feet from the Osceola.

Pete caught the glint of binoculars in the hands of one of the men on board.

"They see us coming but they're not doing anything about it," he reported to Jay Connaught. "That spare gun's in a holster hanging in the cuddy."

Connaught nodded and pushed head and shoulders into the small cabin to get the weapon.

Suddenly Pete uttered a groan of disgust and opened up his boat. It had occurred to the detectives patroling around the Osceola to take a look at that gray motor boat. The yacht tender was running directly toward it, with plumes of water rising from her sharp bow.

The police launch was still too far away to interfere.

What happened happened fast. With a tender full of dicks and a police launch bearing down on them the men of Mat Dorn's mob lost their nerve. The fellow with the binoculars dropped them and bent quickly to the bottom of the boat.

If the agency dicks had been working instead of merely acting, they might have had a chance. As it was, their hands were empty as the tender ranged alongside the old gray boat. They were not expecting trouble.

The man who had stooped came up with a sub-machine gun in his hands. And the two other thugs with him flashed their automatics.

Simultaneously, and as fast as fear-crazed crooks can act, the three stick-ups opened up.

The two detectives, standing, were easy targets. They went down like ducks in a shooting gallery. The sailor at the controls of the tender, who had just shoved his motor out of gear, collapsed over his steering wheel. The other sailor plunged head first over the side.

"Hit it up!" shouted Jay Connaught, brandishing his revolver. "Fast, man!"

"What in hell d'you think I'm doing?" moaned Pete Slocum. His old motor was hammering out the last possible r.p.m.

The three gunmen in the gray motor boat clambered together into the faster motor tender. One of them dragged out of his seat the motionless seaman, limp against the steering wheel. Another shoved away the boat they had abandoned.

The man with the machine gun turned toward the police launch and crouched low, with his Tommy braced on the mahogany coaming of the tender. He swung it rapidly to command the launch. They were so close that Pete could see his narrow, sloping forehead, his receding chin and yellow, jagged teeth. And he had annihilation

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at his finger-tip. The machine gun's muzzle was dead on them!

"Duck!" croaked the harbor cop.

BEFORE Pete Slocum flung himself to his knees he took one quick, keenly calculating glance at the motionless speed boat and the crook clawing his way into the control seat. Once down he was out of sight behind the high bows and diminutive forward cabin of the launch. With slow, careful hands he turned his wheel a trifle to the left.

Jay Connaught crouched in the bottom of the cockpit beside him, cursing fluently.

The sub-machine gun loosed its hurricane of flying lead. Chunks tore into the inch-thick forward planking of the launch. But they traversed the wood of the bow diagonally; the tough timbers stoutly registered their searing passage. The gunner had been one instant slow on the trigger.

For only thirty seconds the surging launch tore through that hail of death. Then, with a crash, its bow sliced into the thin side of the mahogany boat. The sarp stem cut through until it struck the big motor.

The Osceola's tender reeled backward, pinioned on the bow of the onrushing police boat. As the water gushed in the boat settled and was trampled under by the launch's keel.

Pete Slocum pulled himself upright at the first impact. It was well that he did so. The man with the sub-machine gun had leaped with the agility of despair for the flaring bows of the launch. He landed with his weapon on the top of the cabin.

Pete's hand closed around his ankle before he could get his gun to bear. The harbor cop jerked the thug off his balance and pulled him headlong into the cockpit. A crack with the butt of his revolver finished the fellow's share in the proceedings.

Jay Connaught tore the Tommy from the unconscious gunner's grasp. But no target remained to train it on.

The launch had ridden up over the sinking speed boat. Only Pete's quick wrench at the wheel saved it from crashing into the old boat that the crooks had deserted.

Behind in their hissing wake one of the other thugs clawed his way to the surface. The coat of a detective showed briefly and vanished in the swirl of water. A good hundred feet away the sailor who had leaped from the tender still swam frantically toward the Osceola. His mate had gone down with the mahogany boat.

Pete Slocum circled. He dragged aboard the floundering follower of Mat Dorn. Jay Connaught stilled his struggles with a crashing blow to the jaw. Pete thrust the boat hook into Connaught's hands and slowly cruised around, looking for signs of life on the agitated surface. But he saw nothing. Two minutes later he put the launch alongside the starboard gangway of the Osceola.

He was taking no chances on the launch sinking with his two prisoners. Together Connaught and he dragged the captured thugs up onto her deck.

Two detectives closed in on the men as they lay dazed and unresisting on the white deck. Pete looked down at the launch. No water showed above the floorboards. The boat was still seaworthy. The two policemen in one of the rowboats were drifting about, fruitlessly searching for more survivors.

"Why bring those wet creatures here?" demanded an acidulous voice.

Pete Slocum turned to find himself in the presence of the bony-faced and

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ancient Misses Selby. Miss Augustine, as usual, was playing the major rôle, while Miss Penelope lingered at her shoulder.

"Just a little object lesson, my dear cousins," said Jay Connaught in his mild manner. "Cast your eyes on these rats, ladies. They took part in that hold-up yesterday. Something like these will be snatching your treasure from under your noses before you have even started for Europe with it."

"Stuff!" said Miss Augustine, quite unmoved. "We've taken every precaution."

"Two of your precautions—if you can call this covey of detectives precautions—are already out of it without having fired a shot," Jay Connaught remarked with languid sarcasm, jerking a finger downward.

"We've plenty more detectives," retorted the elder Miss Selby. She shook a bony finger angrily in Patrolman Pete Slocum's face. "And you, young man, don't think you'll get any praise from me. You've sunk our best tender—I saw you do it deliberately."

"It was an expensive boat," Miss Penelope put in emphatically.

Pete Slocum clamped his jaw shut. He bent and methodically began to frisk both the prisoners. There was no doubt about their identity; he recognized both as having been in the attack on the armored truck.

"Far be it from me to intrude in your affairs, cousins," Jay Connaught began casually, "but if I can assist you to get your—ah—souvenirs back into the safety of a bank vault—" Miss Augustine's flourished finger halted him.

"So that's it!" the old lady cried. "*You* want to assist us, do you, Jay Connaught? *That's* why you've been getting yourself shot and shot at, is it? *You* want to take charge of it, do you? You're like the rest of those vultures!"

For an instant it seemed to Pete Slocum that a faint redness spread over Jay Connaught's indifferent face underneath the brown of his becoming sunburn. But his laugh sounded refreshingly genuine.

"Discovered!" he said with sardonic mirth. "Unmasked! All my deep contrivings brought to light by the penetrant beam of your shrewd black eyes! My dear cousins, I go before I am ordered away!"

He walked toward the rail and glanced most casually toward the empty deck of his schooner. Then he took out his handkerchief, pressed it twice to his lips and waved it imperatively toward his seaman Hillig, who was rowing down the cove toward the yacht.

But Jay Connaught had taken no more than two steps toward the gangway when, abruptly, the deck of the yacht seemed to shudder.

Simultaneously there came from below them a subdued thud, like the slam of a heavy door. It was no more than a gentle, momentary movement of the ship and a muffled and insignificant sound. But hard upon those two slight manifestations of some unknown force came the voice of Captain Rasmussen on the bridge. He was bawling for the chief engineer and the carpenter.

Pete Slocum shifted his weight from one foot to the other, as if testing out the feel of the deck under his feet. His face bore that puzzled frown that had been on it so often in the last twenty-four hours.

There was something wrong with that deck—something wrong with the old Osceola. The deck was dead under the soles of his feet—as dead and un-

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responsive as if the yacht had suddenly gone aground.

Forward a man popped up out of a hatchway as if shot out of a gun.

Pete Slocum walked to the side and looked over at the height of the gangway ladder above the water. Then he turned back and put himself in the path of the two old ladies, who were moving toward a companionway that would take them below.

"Just a minute, ladies," he said with gentle insistence. "There's something wrong with this old—with your yacht. She feels a bit logy to me."

Captain Rasmussen came swiftly out of the wheelhouse, leaving the earpiece of the engineroom telephone dangling off its hook. His long, melancholy Scandinavian countenance was black with suppressed emotion. He beckoned imperatively to Jay Connaught.

"You will assist in getting the ladies quietly into that launch, Mr. Connaught," he said curtly. "The bottom's been blown out of her! This ship is sinking like a stone!"

CHAPTER X

"Why?"

IN Pete Slocum's mind there was no doubt as to the truth of the yacht captain's words. The ship was settling under his feet. With his staunch police boat alongside the gangway ladder he could not get too excited about that. But why should the Osceola be sinking?

He looked down at his two prisoners. One of them, the narrow-browed machine gunner, had almost recovered from the crack on the head Pete had dealt him with his revolver. He was staring this way and that at the startled men around him.

"Slocum, I wonder if there's any connection between this explosion below and Mr. Dorn's thugs who were standing by waiting for something?" Connaught remarked. "Do you suppose they planned to start a panic, and then seize what gold they could during the confusion? But where's Dorn?"

Pete Slocum opened his mouth; then, remembering the numerous retainers of the Misses Selby thronging around him, he closed it again. He shook his head in bewilderment. "Dunno!" he muttered, as if the explosion had blown the wits out of his head.

Jay Connaught smiled fleetingly. "You'll pardon me if I escort the ladies into your launch? It may take some doing."

He turned toward the ladies.

"Go ahead!" Pete muttered. He bent, fitted his fingers in the collar of the machine gunner's coat and heaved him up onto his feet.

"I'm keeping this one with me," the harbor cop said to the uneasy private detectives. "You two take the other cannon ashore with you in the launch and turn him over to Chief Fowler."

One of the dicks opened his mouth.

"Don't argue—do it!" Pete rasped. "This gold you're guarding will be under salt water inside three minutes."

He swung his captive around and marched him toward the engine room companionway. The man balked feebly at the top of the steel stairs reaching down into the bowels of the ship.

"She's sinkin' on us—I don't want to go down there, cop!" he protested.

Pete reached for his gun. His manner had changed completely. "Walk down or I'll tap you and throw you down, sap!" he said crisply. "That's right! Did they ever name you?"

Gingerly, with his head back-turned

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to eye Pete's revolver, the yellow-fanged killer descended the oily steps beside the huge gleaming silent engines.

"My name's Massey!" he muttered. "Jim Massey! Listen—I can see the water comin' in down there a'ready! She's sinkin'! You c'n ask this guy coming up—"

A plump little Welshman, chief engineer of the yacht, was reluctantly ascending toward them. His eyes were turned down toward his engines; he almost walked into them.

"Boiler let go, chief?" Pete Slocum asked.

The engineer snarled at him. "'Twas no boiler!" he raged. "Why would it be a boiler with no more steam up than enough to run the auxiliaries? 'Twas something else—but what I'll not even guess. The water's covered it over by now, but it was dirty work—the blackest sort o' dirty work!"

He brushed past. "Unless ye've a mind to drown in a cage ye'd best be getting on deck, policeman," he warned, and vanished upward.

"You heard him!" Jim Massey moaned, and then ducked as he saw the harbor cop's hand tightening on his gun.

Pete Slocum drove him on—down onto the engine room plates. Already dirty, coal-dust covered water was slopping over them. Massey's protruding eyes were rolling; he was shaking and licking his lips.

"We're going to stay here—until you come through with the stunt you and Dorn and somebody else were pulling today," Pete said in his husky voice. "If you'd like to live a while longer you'd better talk fast."

Massey clutched appealingly at Pete's arm. "I swear I don't know what the play was!" he declared. "I got a call from Dorn—and a funny sort of voice he had, too, but it was him, all right. He told me to come up here with the boys, get a boat, and take a look. That was all! I ain't seen him since we knocked off the truck!"

Pete gave vent to an unbelieving croak. He leaned against a steel rail and looked at the water. It was coming up fast. But his face had no more feeling in it than the fire door of one of the yacht's furnaces.

At short intervals he told the killer to talk. The lights went out. Massey begged and prayed as the water came up on them, covering their feet, their knees, their thighs. Pete's face got drawn and bleak, but he did not move.

Massey shrieked out his pleas. He knew nothing about the explosion. He would tell everything about the stick-up—he would confess murder. But he knew nothing about the explosion.

"I don't know the play!" he wailed.

"Who tipped you off to the gold shipment?"

"Mat got it in town—I don't know where."

"Who worked with you in Stamwich?"

"Nobody! Nobody—as far as I know! I swear—"

The man would have fallen into the dirty, rising water as he shrieked out that denial if Pete had not seized him.

Against his will Pete was convinced that there was no chance to pick up what he wanted from Jim Massey. The man had cracked. But he didn't know anything.

THE Osceola rolled suddenly to starboard, sending them splashing into a leaping, swirling mass of black water. Pete clawed his way to the ladder, dragging Massey, who had suddenly gone paralyzed with fear, after him. It was hard going for the

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policeman himself was still none too strong.

Once on the steps the man revived and they clattered up the crazily slanting stairs onto the deck.

There was no standing on that deck.

"Overboard!" Pete commanded. They slid down to the rail, already almost under water, and flung themselves into the sea.

Two town cops in a near-by rowboat, braving the suction of the sinking ship, picked them up.

A minute later the Osceola suddenly straightened to rise her bow to the sky. Her stern slid under. Then, abruptly, it came to a shuddering stop as the counter hit the bottom. Her bow settled rapidly; two waves leaped to meet each other on her deck and she sank down to the floor of the cove. Only the slanting tops of her masts and the rim of her funnel showed above the hissing, gushing waves.

Another boat picked up old Rasmussen, who had gone stubbornly back to his bridge to die in this sheltered cove as a shipmaster might go down with his ship in mid-ocean. The old man was too dazed to resist.

The police launch, with Chief Fowler's long, worried face and Jay Connaught's placid countenance showing in the bow, came alongside the rowboat. The chief motioned Pete to bring his prisoner on board. He listened in silence as Pete told him of Massey's denial.

"You didn't get anything out of that crazy stunt," the chief said at last, and chewed at his iron-gray mustache. "Put Mr. Connaught on board his schooner."

Pete Slocum didn't answer out loud as he headed toward the Sea Quest. His gray, perplexed eyes turned backward once to glance at the masts of the sunken yacht and then he muttered to himself: "I got this much: that Dorn didn't blow up that yacht."

Jay Connaught suddenly laughed softly. "One of your problems is solved, anyhow, Chief," he said. "You needn't worry about guarding that gold. Forty feet of water will do it for you."

Chief Fowler nodded. "That's something," he conceded. "D'you think Dorn planted a bomb in her so he could raid her while she was sinking?"

Jay Connaught raised his shoulders and his eyebrows.

"Don't thrust your problem at me," he said. "I've an idea the old wreck's plates were thin enough to open up without much provocation. But whether something in the engine room let go or Dorn sunk her deliberately is a matter that only a salvage ship can find out for you."

The police chief caressed his mustache. "And it'll be a while before anybody can hire a salvage tug to work on her," he said. "There's a U. S. marshal ashore with a Federal court order restraining the ladies from touching the gold or moving the yacht!"

The launch ran alongside the schooner. Jay Connaught paused at the bottom of the companionway ladder.

"My guess is that when the legal battle's over the lawyers and the salvage outfit will own every ounce of gold in her for professional services rendered," he predicted, and swung himself up on to the deck of his schooner.

Chief Fowler grunted in something like relief as they chugged away from the schooner. "That gold is safe enough now, Slocum," he muttered.

Pete fingered the black bruises upon

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his neck and looked disconsolately at Jim Massey's stubby fingers. "Chief, I'm getting that somebody smarter than Mat Dorn is after it!" he said.

"Evidence?" snapped the chief. "Name of suspect?"

Pete Slocum shook his head. "There isn't going to be any evidence," he said. "And all I can tell you of the suspect is that one exists!"

CHAPTER XI

The Challenge

THERE was a moon that night. Jay Connaught, strolling toward his boathouse after a late and leisurely dinner, diverged from the straight course to climb the little rise of land between his estate and the cove.

Down the line of molten quicksilver which marked the path of the moon across the water he made out the slanting top of the Osceola's foremast, and nodded quietly. The spectator fleet was gone. Only one motor boat was chugging slowly about the cove, with its searchlight flitting restlessly over the water. A rowboat drifted slowly near the projecting spar.

Connaught knew that old Captain Rasmussen occupied the rowboat; a couple of agency detectives rode in the solitary patrolling motor boat.

The yachtsman turned back a trifle more briskly toward his boathouse. It was in darkness, but he stepped with sure knowledge across the floor of the big room toward the staircase.

"Lusk!" he called.

There was no answer, but to his ears there came the sound of a footfall near him. Then he made out the loom of a man's body, passing close to him. Reacting instantly, he sprang forward. His hands closed on the man.

For a moment the unknown tried to wrench himself free; then abruptly stiffened.

"Take it, then!" the intruder rasped at him.

Simultaneously Jay Connaught felt the thrust of something toward his chest. His right hand slashed at it, knocking it away. A gun roared in his ears; the orange flash showed very close to his side.

Before the man could fire again Connaught's fingers closed on the barrel of the gun. With a muscular effort surprisingly strong in so slim and languid a man he tore the gun clear of the hand that held it. Reversing it, he jabbed it hard into the stomach of his unseen enemy. He backed the man against the nearest wall.

"Now light a match!" Connaught commanded cripsly. "Do anything else and I'll put your own light out!"

The match flared.

Jay Connaught stared into the sullen face of Mat Dorn. The flickering match showed a faint flush rising in Jay Connaught's expressionless face and smooth forehead. It was a danger signal, and, by some obscure instinct, Mat Dorn recognized it as such.

"Listen!" he said hoarsely. "All I done to your big gorilla just now when I got a chance was to knock him cold with an oar. He's in that closet where you had me. But I'm askin' you—why wouldn't I be of more use to you than that ape?"

"You will be," Jay Connaught promised him softly. "You'll be of great use to me as a fall-guy."

Electrified by a sudden, surging fear, Mat Dorn ducked swiftly in an attempt to fling himself toward the door.

He had not the slightest chance. Connaught's finger squeezed the trigger once, at precisely the right moment. The automatic muzzle was not two

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inches from the target. Mat Dorn crumpled up with a bullet through his heart.

Jay Connaught lit another match. It flared only briefly, but the light lasted long enough for the marine biologist's keen glance to assure him that the man was dead.

Abruptly he dropped the match and stood still in the darkness, listening. His ears had caught the sudden chug of a motor out on the waters of the harbor. It sounded to him like the old engine of the police launch. He strode to the window and looked out. Well out on the bay, but not beyond the sound of a pistol shot, the red and green running lights of a small boat showed. It was coming head on toward the boathouse. He shook his head.

"Too energetic—that dull young man," he murmured.

Leaving the dead thug as he had fallen, Connaught felt his way toward the wall where a flashlight always hung, found it and turned its beams toward the locker in which Dorn had been imprisoned.

Now Bart Lusk, huge arms flung out, sprawled in the closet with a lump still rising on his forehead. He was not far from consciousness. With the toe of his shoe Jay Connaught vigorously restored him to life. Bewildered, with aching ribs, Lusk crawled onto his knees.

"Get that starboard light lit," Connaught commanded, nodding toward one of the kerosene lanterns hanging on the wall. "In a hurry!"

Another kick spurred Lusk into movement. In a minute he had the green light burning. Its rays fell suddenly upon the body of Mat Dorn. Lusk almost dropped the light.

Jay Connaught seized the lantern. "Just a few hours ahead of time—that's all," he said to his quaking boatman. "Wrap the body in that old foresail and stow it in the big sail bag. Then clean up."

QUICKLY he made his way upstairs to the balcony overlooking Stamwich harbor. With a piece of marlin he lashed the green lantern in place. It was the signal he had told Pete Slocum that he would show if he had any news for the harbor cop. The police launch was quite close to the landing stage of the boathouse now.

He descended and stopped to speak to Bart Lusk, who, with the foresail spread out on the floor, was still busy with his gruesome task.

"When you get Dorn stowed in that bag bring it out onto the landing stage," Connaught commanded. "And don't carry it as if it weighed more than a tightly-packed mainsail would. We're entertaining the harbor hick."

Leaving Lusk gaping after him, he walked out onto the landing stage and stood there while Pete Slocum ran the launch alongside.

"My boatman's just come back from town," he said. "He tells me he saw a fellow with a twisted nose as well as a couple of other strangers aboard an old motor boat up near the railway bridge."

"Huh?" interrupted Pete.

"They were aground on the mud flats and seemed to be waiting for the tide," Connaught explained patiently. "My man may have been drunk—he'd had a few—but if he isn't, then Mat Dorn's stranded and easy picking until the tide comes in."

Pete Slocum nodded slowly. "Won't be much water up there for another hour," he said. "It's worth looking into."

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He looked with some curiosity at the boathouse. "Thought I heard a couple of shots—rather muffled—from somewhere in here," he said.

"You did," Jay Connaught replied promptly. "Ever try knocking over water rats? A flashlight in one hand and a pistol in the other? It's quite a trick, but I think I got one under the boathouse."

"There are more false leads in this case than anything I ever run into," Pete Slocum complained, much disappointed. "I thought something was breaking over here when I heard the shots and then saw your lantern. I've been standing by near the cove. Just sort of watching."

"I'll keep an eye on what can be seen of the Osceola for you," Jay Connaught volunteered casually. "I'm going out to my schooner and I'll stay on deck until two A.M. if you decide to go after this Dorn clue."

"Thanks," Pete said. "I'll run up toward the railroad bridge for a look at the mud flats."

Jay Connaught turned toward his boathouse. "Lusk!" he called. "Come along with that sail bag! What's keeping you?"

A dim shape — a bent, squat man with a huge bag on his shoulders, emerged slowly, almost reluctantly, from the boathouse. Pete Slocum flicked a flashlight at the man and his burden; then snapped it off.

Jay Connaught stood stiffly motionless, watching, his eyes full of sardonic and disinterested amusement as his frightened man crept toward them, once more cloaked by darkness. In complete command of this ticklish situation, Connaught was enjoying himself, as a man might enjoy a triumph over some formidable obstacle. The terror of the silent Bart Lusk, the ignorance of the policeman, his own daring, all combined to gratify his vanity, and stimulate his perverted sense of humor.

This was a challenge — Jay Connaught's brain arrayed against the massed mentality of all the cops in Stamwich.

CHAPTER XII

Bubbles!

PETER SLOCUM, surging up the harbor under full throttle, was put to it to work out what Mat Dorn in a motor boat could be planning to do toward laying hands on the gold of the Misses Selby. This clue bothered him. For why should Dorn stay aboard a stranded motor boat? How could anybody get at a fortune under the surface?

Just one way. There was just one way—even if it did seem haywire. And that was what he ought to be guarding against. Who cared about a cheap cannon like Dorn?

Pete peered at his watch. Quarter of twelve. Then, decisively, he swung the wheel.

The launch swung around to starboard on a course at right angles to the one that led to Stamwich, headed for an arm of land that sheltered a little fleet of fishing and pleasure boats.

In another five minutes the police boat was sliding alongside a tiny sailing dinghy. Though it was not his, Pete could sail it better than its owner, one of his harbor friends. Within another ten minutes he was in the little craft with the sail raised to the gentle night breeze. Steadily the police launch, made fast to the dinghy's mooring, grew smaller behind him.

With the wind abeam he ghosted along in the direction of the cove.

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There was not a ripple on the surface save those made by the musical progress of the little boat's stem. Off the point that formed one sheltering arm of the cove he dropped his sail and took to his oars. Carefully keeping out of the moonpath, he rowed noiselessly through the entrance of the little landlocked bay.

Without the bulk of the old Osceola looming just inside, the curving arms of the cove looked strangely empty. The old schooner Sea Quest seemed deserted or manned only by sleeping men. A single dim riding light, suspended from her headstay, marked her position; her bulk and her looming masts appeared mere ghostly things to Pete, although he was moving close to her.

Captain Rasmussen, who had been brooding over the wreck of his command earlier in the night, was no longer in sight. His rowboat had vanished. From the Selby pier, at which the light of the detectives' patrol boat showed, came no challenge to Pete Slocum. Softly he drew close to the leaning foremast of the sunken steam yacht. It would take sharp and vigilant eyes on that distant pier to detect the rowboat, and this was that part of the night that sailors, with good reason, call the gravy-eye watch.

Pete lay on his oars, blades trailing in the water. He was now almost over the yacht. He had directed his course so that the moonpath would fall across the surface above the Osceola.

To his ears, sharpened by the stillness of the placid hour, came the steady bubble of air still escaping from the compartments of the sunken ship. The flow of imprisoned air to the surface was much slighter now than just after her sinking; the water had almost entirely completed its invasion of the interior of the yacht.

As he drifted closer, Pete inspected narrowly those streams of bubbles. Only in the silver moonpath could be seen the tiny pockmarks on the smooth surface.

In one place uprushing air raised more commotion than elsewhere. Pete Slocum stopped his drift over this fountain. He held his boat motionless, with gently dripping oars.

It seemed to him that the stream of bubbles was moving. It was shifting along a line parallel with the slanting deck of the ship down under the water.

Bubbles moving across the cove.

Tensely Pete Slocum peered down into the black water. An eerie feeling stole over him. He drew a quick breath. Was it only his imagination, or did he actually see far down in that quiet liquid darkness a gleam of yellow light?

"I'm screwy—or I'm good!" he muttered. "And I'm going to find out which—right now!"

With another swing of his oars he pushed his boat ahead of the path taken by the slow-moving bubbles. The little globes of air, bursting through the surface, seemed to follow his course.

He boated his oars and flung off his coat, shoes and holster. Then he caught up the sailing dinghy's little kedge anchor. Clutching the iron weight he put a foot on the stem of the boat and carefully measured his position. Then, with the anchor tightly held in both hands, he dived over the bow.

The anchor and the force of his plunge sent him rushing swiftly downward through the black water. He made no attempt to increase his speed by kicking or stroking; he hoarded every bit of oxygen in his lungs.

The anchor touched something with a thump. Even in the water it sounded like wood. He was on the deck or

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superstructure of the sunken yacht. He could vaguely sense the slant of the thing.

With one hand gripping the anchor he clawed about on the deck with the other. His stretching fingers thrust this way and that, feeling for something. His eyes, though wide open, were useless.

He felt on—feeling for something that would explain that moving line of bubbles.

Suddenly his reaching hand touched a thing. It was a thin, flexible cable. He pulled at it. Almost intently, as if his movement had caused it, a brilliant, completely blinding radiance filled the water.

Involuntarily he let go of the cable and his fingers came into contact with something else—a human hand!

FOR a moment, in spite of all his suspicions and reasoning, Pete Slocum fought against a thrill of horror. To touch a living hand down here on the bottom, in the midst of that infernal submarine brilliance, was more than even his steady nerves could stand. Bubbles burst from his mouth in his gasp of surprise.

But those fingers were doing more than touching his, now. They had interlaced with his own reaching fingers by the mere accident of contact. But now they tightened, in a locking grasp.

All this had taken place in a mere fraction of a minute. Even so, Pete Slocum's lungs were clamoring for more oyxgen.

He released the anchor that held him to the deck. But before he could push himself upward another arm had come out of the hideous brilliance and hooked around his neck. He could feel the coarse canvas covering it, like the rough skin of some great fish.

Pete Slocum was dragged against the inflated suit and huge, globular helmet of a diver. And that diver gripped him tightly, with both hands, and held him motionless in a hug that seemed lightly to end only with death.

The light that enveloped Pete Slocum slowly faded in power; the thing apparently had been dropped by the diver and slid away down the slanting deck. But Pete's mind was not focussed now upon light or darkness. His whole being, body and brain, was concentrated on one thing—air!

With the fury and savagery of a wild beast in a trap Pete Slocum doubled up his legs, got a position with one foot and one knee against the diver's body and kicked out madly, in a mighty spasm of frenzied action. His feet flailed at that inflated suit, and his hands, flat against the helmet, pushed in most desperate strength.

It was well that that first ten seconds of tremendous effort tore him free. For Pete Slocum spent all the power of his body, all the air in his lungs, upon it. He felt the arms of the diver, hindered by the heavy and bulging canvas that encased them, slowly relinquishing that viselike hold upon his neck.

Free of chancery, he had energy for no more than a feeble kick or two that sent him slowly drifting upward. Up! The water was endlessly deep.

Hardly conscious, his head broke through the surface. How long he lay upon the surface, feebly treading water with only his nose and mouth out of water; how long he gripped the gunwale of the boat, too exhausted to pull himself aboard, he never knew.

Eventually the recuperative power of a healthy body lifted him back to complete consciousness. With consciousness came the need for action. Like a bugle call in his brain came that

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summons to be getting on with this job.

Slowly his head turned toward the only vessel within a diver's short range of action—the dark schooner Sea Quest. The bubbles he had watched ranged from the sunken Osceola in her direction.

Pete Slocum picked up his oars and rowed toward the ship. He rowed with all his reviving strength, for he realized abruptly that he must, if he were to reconnoiter, beat that diver across the bay. Until the man in the copper helmet got back to his base Pete Slocum still had the element of surprise on his side.

He reached the bow without having heard a sound from the deck of the vessel. With great caution he circled the sizable craft, straining his eyes for a sign of motion, for a diver's lines trailing over the bulwarks, for the head of the diver's tender showing above the rail.

He saw nothing. Nothing! The Sea Quest remained a sleeping ship. His brow wrinkled in perplexity, but his lips set in stubborn determination. Back at the stem of the ship he made fast his rowboat to the anchor chain of the schooner. He strapped on his holster and saw to it that his revolver was firmly held within its leather sides. Then he laid hold of the taut chain. Without a sound, hand over hand, he pulled himself up toward the projecting bows of the ship.

With one hand he managed to get a hold on the low rail. Then he reached inboard and got another grip on the cable as it led toward the anchor windlass. In another moment he dragged himself up onto his chest on deck. He slung a leg over the side and eased himself up onto his knees.

His eyes caught a vague movement in the shadows by the windlass. Simultaneously, though he tried to dodge, a heavy blow landed on his head above his ear. The weapon sent a torturing stab of pain along his nerves from head to heart. He was not knocked out; that swing in the dark had struck him only glancingly, but he was sick with pain.

Before he could muster the power to reach for his gun in that flaming moment of agony and bewilderment great long fingers closed around his neck. They sent a flash of recognition through his mind, and they sank exactly into the bruise marks on his throat, wringing soul and body with new, sickening torment. Dazed, he was dragged off the deck and shaken like a rat in a terrier's teeth. Savagely he was jerked aft toward the forehatch.

Next instant he had the impression of falling. He thumped down upon solid timbers in a space that was suddenly, though no more than dimly, lighted.

His right hand darted toward his holster. His fingers closed on empty air. His revolver was gone!

CHAPTER XIII

The Secret of the Schooner

SOMEBODY laughed softly. With a great effort he sat up. Gradually things took shape. He was plainly in the fore hold of the Sea Quest and the hatch was fastened on above his head. Around him were things like air pumps, air flasks, great coils of hose and other gear of similar purpose. There were also a number of boxes, small black metal boxes, piled on the floor.

On the rim of a sort of well in the center of this compartment a man in a diver's suit, but without a diver's helmet, was smiling at him.

The diver was Jay Connaught. He seemed thoroughly at ease here in his diving suit, in the midst of the equip-

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ment he used in his hobby of marine biology and sea exploration. A squat, hulking man with huge hands, Bart Lusk, as Pete remembered, and Hillig, the Sea Quest's watchman, were standing on either side of him.

Beaten! That thought throbbed like another pain in Pete Slocum's tormented head.

"It is really a great relief to see you, Slocum," Jay Connaught said mildly. "If you had had the wit to row hell-bent for shore after our submarine encounter I would have been seriously perturbed."

Pete Slocum did not answer. He was staring at the bronze-rimmed well, upon the edge of which Jay Connaught was sitting. It took him no more than a glance to realize the purpose of that caissonlike thing, for it explained why no diver's lines and no mass of diving equipment had been in use that night on the Sea Quest's deck.

Like a centerboard trunk, that circular bronze cylinder extended from above the ship's waterline down through her bottom. Since the top was above the line of the sea no water could enter the ship, and yet a diver might descend direct from this room through the ship's bottom to the floor of the sea. It was a simple yet most ingenious improvement upon the usual diving methods.

Beaten! How that thought burned!

"A great relief to have you with me, Slocum," Jay Connaught assured him. For the first time his smile revealed his teeth—white, even teeth. "I had intended to induce you to come on board, but you anticipated me above water and below it, too."

Pete Slocum gulped; then stiffened rigidly. His eyes had been drawn by some strange instinct to a darker corner of the hold. There, stretched out together on the floor, sprawled the body of a man with a twisted nose and the body of Captain Rasmussen. The huge sail bag lay beside the two dead men.

"I congratulate you—temporarily," Connaught said. He was fondling an automatic, turning it over and over in his hands, as he spoke. "You have at last run down Mat Dorn himself—and also solved the mystery of the disappearance of the prying captain of the Osceola, who came aboard this schooner unbidden and in secret no more than an hour ago."

Pete Slocum moved to stare at Connaught with hard, level eyes. Pete was feeling bad, for he had behaved like a headstrong fool instead of a good cop.

Jay Connaught shook his head in sorrowful sympathy. Slowly he shifted his pistol to his right hand, leaning forward to rest one canvas-covered elbow on his knee.

"It would have been highly embarrassing—your account of your adventure on the bottom, Slocum," he said. "However, all's well that ends well. And you may rely upon me to see to it that you get full credit for the slaying of Mat Dorn—posthumous credit, of course."

It was plain that Jay Connaught was enjoying himself. Though his face was calm his eyes were agleam with malicious glee. He nodded meditatively.

"Of course we'll have to work the late Captain Rasmussen into the tableau, somehow," he murmured. "But there'll be glory for all when you're found—glory even for Mat Dorn, originator of the most ingenious and profitable robbery of the century, who, unfortunately, failed to live to enjoy his spoils. I've kept him well in the foreground. I'll do a good job, Slocum, just as I'm doing a good job in

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shifting these little boxes of gold over to where they'll be most useful."

He touched one of the black boxes with a leaden-shod toe.

"Nobody will know they're gone for some little time after you and Dorn and Rasmussen have been found," he added. "All three of you will be laid out in the launch when it's picked up adrift somewhere in the Sound. The harbor hick will be the harbor hero."

"You've done a good job—almost," said Pete Slocum abruptly.

With those two murdered men so deliberately exposed to his eyes he realized that he himself had not many minutes to live. But he would not die without one last attempt to maneuver this self-satisfied killer into a move that might ruin him. Pete's wits were keyed up with the limit in quickness and keenness by his iminent peril.

"A good job—almost, Mr. Connaught," he said tauntingly. "But if you think only I have been watching you—you're wrong! A good job—almost! I'm dumb. But you've forgotten old Chief Fowler."

The harbor cop saw that he had the unwavering attention of Jay Connaught and his two followers. To them the slab-faced chief was almost an unknown quantity. Pete took his name and contrived to smile.

"Your worst slip, Mr. Connaught, was that you were too blasted helpful to us," Pete said. "You aren't helpful by nature; you haven't that reputation around town. Chief Fowler couldn't understand it when you risked your neck in the truck holdup and later when you and I ran down Jim Massey's boat. Almost—a good job."

He smiled again, contemptuously, and Jay Connaught, listening intently, did not speak.

"It wasn't to your benefit to antagonize your peculiar cousins, the Misses Selby, by showing too much interest in their treasure. But you did mix in—apparently just to help a small town police chief and a harbor cop. Kindness of heart isn't your line. Can you blame the chief for wondering how Mat Dorn padlocked himself inside that lobsterman's shack? Or for wanting to know why your long-fingered boatman"—he nodded toward the scowling Bart Lusk—"strangled me? Or for arranging to signal me in the launch if you ran down any clues?"

Slowly Pete shook his head. "Not your line," he repeated. He was watching Connaught's face and picking his words carefully. A question in the back of his mind became a suspicion.

"Then that unfortunate accident to your secretary, Gregory Larch," he ventured, and plainly saw the tall yachtsman's mouth twitch. "The chief didn't like it, Mr. Connaught," he declared confidently. "Not at all."

He leaned forward, to speak with deadly emphasis:

"And neither did he like the fact that you, an expert diver and authority on submarine exploration should have a ship lying right alongside when somebody blew a hole in the Osceola. He wondered if the nitro had been planted on the old yacht's bottom with wires running back to the Sea Quest so that you could arrange to have a hole kicked in her plates at a moment when you had a perfect alibi. The chief isn't as dumb as I am."

PETE'S concocted story was registering as truth in the ears of the listening trio. Jay Connaught's face above the broad breastplate of his diving suit was smooth enough, but it was rigid smoothness that meant repressed emotion. And Bart Lusk and

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Hillig were white, shaking, staring with mouths agape.

"When you dropped the Osceola onto the bottom, Mr. Connaught, you put her where only you, of all the crooks who were after the Misses Selby's little savings, could get at them. That seemed conclusive to the chief. But there was one other slip, Mr. Connaught."

He stood up, and Connaught rose alertly from the rim of the diving well. But Pete did not even look at him or the automatic in his white fingers. Eyed by all three of his captors he walked slowly, feebly, toward the two murdered men and the sail bag. Connaught turned slightly, to watch him more vigilantly.

But after four shaky steps, which brought him only slantingly nearer to the tall man in diving gear, Pete's sagging, uncertain body suddenly jerked like a spring released from tension. Whirling, he flung himself headlong at Jay Connaught. It might have been the last move of his life; he put all that was left of his being and spirit into it.

His plunging body, with bent head and rigid shoulders, struck the man in the cumbersome diving suit squarely just above the weighted belt.

Connaught was knocked backward. His legs hit the rim of the well and he toppled over into it. And Pete Slocum, as a bullet roared past him, fell with him into water lapping several feet below that bronze rim.

Connaught, burdened by breastplate, belt, and leaden shoes, sank swiftly down the well, but not too swiftly to lay clutching hands upon Pete Slocum. In a swirling, breathless struggle they drifted downward through the wide round chamber and through the opening in the bottom of the schooner.

But now Pete Slocum had all the advantage. There was no helmet on Jay Connaught's head, bringing him revivifying air from the topside. His body was weighted as well as cumbered by the diving suit. Pete's wiry body wrenched itself free from Connaught's grasp while enough oxygen still remained in his lungs to permit the struggle.

Pete felt the clutch of one of Jay Connaught's hands on his ankle as the man was dragged on down into the depths. Then he was free. Swimming desperately and blindly he struggled to get clear of the schooner's bottom. He clawed his way upward and thrust arms and head into the air.

He found himself not far from the schooner's bow; not far from his rowboat. He urged himself toward the boat, heedless of noise, and clambered in as he heard the thud of feet on the deck of the schooner as Lusk and Hillig rushed from below.

Hot lead in plenty hummed past him in the tense seconds before he could drive his boat beyond range of the two frightened rogues on the Sea Quest. But he was not a good enough target in the night to be hit.

THOUGH all their gold was recovered, the body of Jay Connaught raised from the bottom of the cove and Lusk and Hillig captured, the Misses Selby were inclined to be tart about the whole matter when Chief Fowler and Pete Slocum visited them to demand their presence at the arraignment.

"Botched — botched from first to last!" declared Miss Augustine, shaking her withered features at Chief Fowler. "If you knew all about rascally Cousin Jay from the very start, as these men Lusk and Hillig say, why did you let him blow up our yacht?"

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"I knew all about Connaught from the start?" Chief Fowler repeated blankly. "I knew—"

"These two creatures, Lusk and Hillig, say so—and why should they lie about that when they've confessed everything else?" Miss Augustine demanded.

"Why?" murmured Miss Penelope, "our private detectives, who caught them when they tried to get ashore, told us they said that."

Pete Slocum didn't make any remarks. It didn't seem to be the moment to complicate matters.

"You may be a great detective, Chief What-ever-your-name-is," Miss Augustine rasped, "but you've permitted our yacht, and our tender, too, to be sunk. There's no reward. Do you understand—no reward!"

"I wasn't looking for any, ladies," said Chief Fowler with dignity. "And neither was Patrolman Slocum here, except the reward of a job cleaned up. Good day."

"No reward?" Pete Slocum repeated, as they walked out through the huge, stuffy hall into the bright sunlight. "I'm alive, I guess! Isn't just coming through a jam like that reward enough?"

Chief Fowler lighted his pipe and glanced sideways at his youthful harbor patrolman. "As one cop to another, the answer is yes," he said. "Now, young fellow, about me being a great detective . . . Come through!"

Watch for These Two Thrilling Stories!

LADY FINGER

By Howard McLellan

The seductive, rouged, hard-boiled molls that lure gangsters to death

SHANGHAIED

By Tom Roan

Another Dan Riddle story—a true account of an unscrupulous private detective agency.

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ILLUSTRATED CRIMES

by Paul Berdanier

A "Model Servant's" Crime

Mrs. Julia Heilner, wife of a well-to-do German-American corset-maker in Brooklyn was sure she had a "find" in the servant the Seaman's Institute had sent her. The man was Joseph Hanel, an ex-steward.

On the morning of April 23, 1915, Mr. Heilner and his nephew, Paul Vogel, went off as usual to their offices. Miss Helen Buck, a guest of the family, went visiting in the neighborhood. The new model butler was alone with Mrs. Heilner. About noon, Miss Buck telephoned and thought it strange when Hanel answered and said Mrs. Heilner was unable to come to the 'phone. She hurried back to the Heilner house, and saw Hanel come out carrying a parcel and wearing one of Paul Vogel's high collars.

"Where are you going, Joe?" she asked.

"Oh, home, I guess." He ambled off down the street.

JOSEPH HANEL

The house was locked. Miss Buck asked a neighbor's hired man to climb in through a pantry window. As the man peered inside he paled and drew back. Mrs. Heilner was lying on the pantry floor, her head covered by a bloodsoaked tablecloth. When policemen broke in they found Mrs. Heilner, terribly beaten, but still alive. But she died in a few minutes. She had been beaten with a beer bottle, and her murderer had bound her neck with heavy twine to strangle her.

COMING NEXT WEEK—

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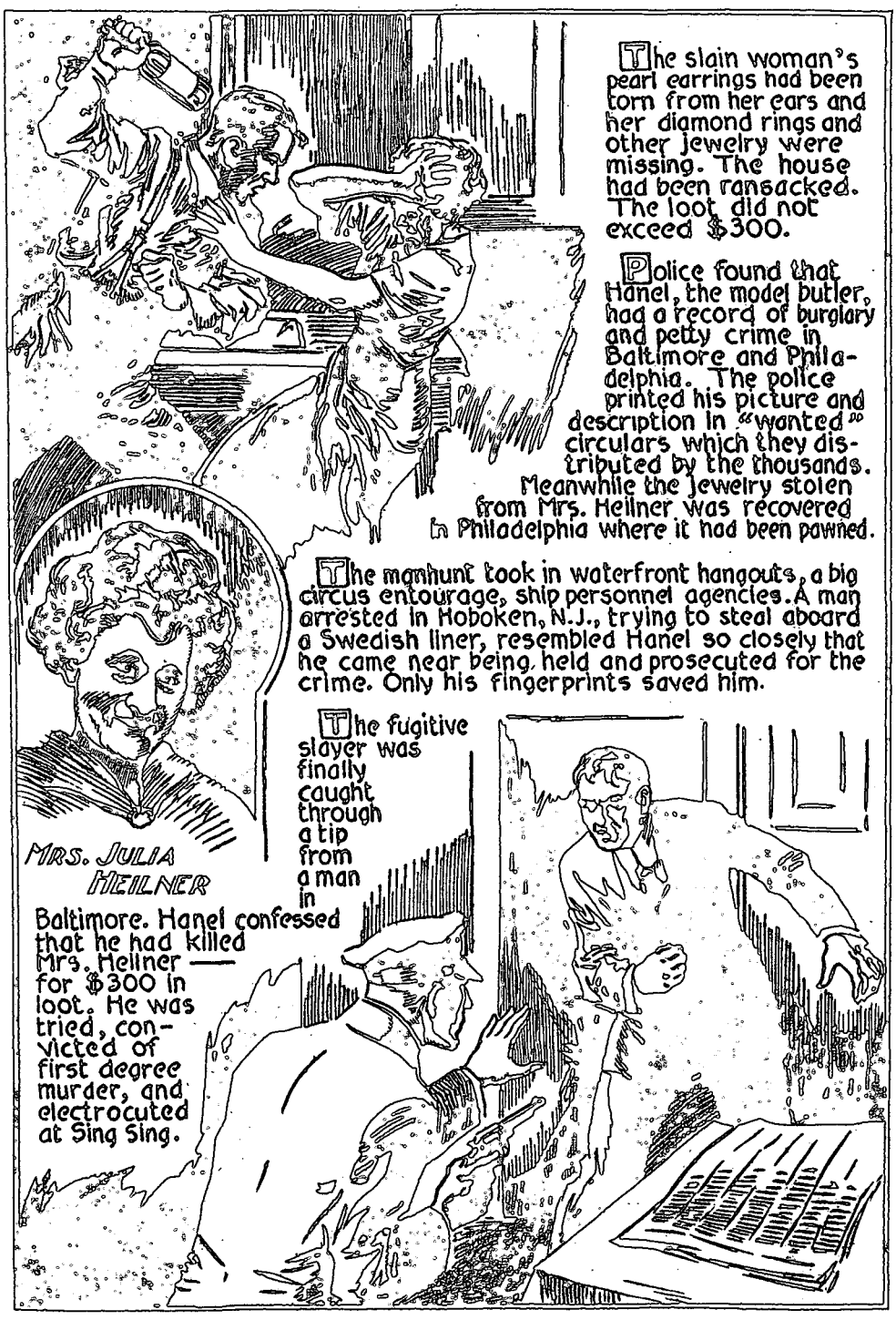

The slain woman's pearl earrings had been torn from her ears and her diamond rings and other jewelry were missing. The house had been ransacked. The loot did not exceed $300.

Police found that Hanel, the model butler, had a record of burglary and petty crime in Baltimore and Philadelphia. The police printed his picture and description in "wanted" circulars which they distributed by the thousands. Meanwhile the jewelry stolen from Mrs. Heilner was recovered in Philadelphia where it had been pawned.

The manhunt took in waterfront hangouts, a big circus entourage, ship personnel agencies. A man arrested in Hoboken, N.J., trying to steal aboard a Swedish liner, resembled Hanel so closely that he came near being held and prosecuted for the crime. Only his fingerprints saved him.

The fugitive slayer was finally caught through a tip from a man in Baltimore. Hanel confessed that he had killed Mrs. Heilner — for $300 in loot. He was tried, convicted of first degree murder, and electrocuted at Sing Sing.

MRS. JULIA HEILNER

THE MYSTERY OF THE ISLIP, L. I., SKELETON

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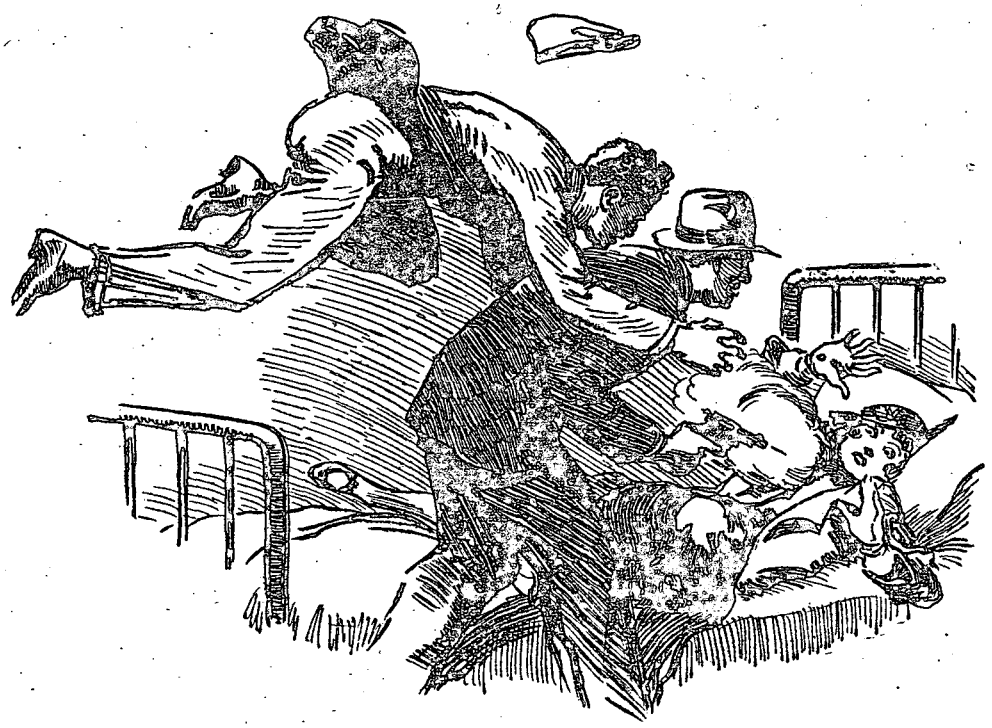

Andy was flying through the air

False-Face

By Fred MacIsaac

A Double-Crossing Blonde Flees a Blazing Hotel with $450,000 — and Andy Adams Lays Himself Open to a Charge of Murder

DON'T MISS THIS STORY—BEGIN HERE

ANDY ADAMS was the powerful managing editor of the Benton *Globe*. Yet when his friend Ranger, the evangelist, was framed and blackmailed for $100,000 by the corrupt police, he could do nothing. For Bill Brand, the boss, and Tim Hobson, the dissipated, devil-may-care criminal lawyer, owned the town.

But when Lloyd Oldham, president of the Benton National Bank, is stabbed, and the next morning John Stover, the bank cashier, is arrested by fake officers for the crime, and tossed out on the road, shot, Adams confronts Brand and threatens to blow his corrupt Ring wide open. For the shock of the news of the father's death has caused Adele Stover to faint in the street. A taxi ran over her and killed her. She was Andy's fiancée. He has nothing left to live for but vengeance.

Because of his threat to the all-powerful boss he is discharged. But Tim Hobson offers him $5,000—if he will get out of town. He takes it—but uses it to pay a

This story began in DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY for November 3

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surgeon who changes his handsome face into the commonplace features of "Tom Carty." With an appointment as special agent of the Department of Justice, Andy comes back to Benton with a new face, under the name of Tom Carty, to smash the Ring.

By robbing Brand's safe, he obtains evidence that Oldham and Stover were murdered because they refused to underwrite a $20,000,000 river tunnel bond issue. A pretty girl, Brand's niece, drives Andy away before he can abstract any further evidence. Yet this is enough.

Brand and Hobson decide that Andy Adams must have done the robbery, and give orders to kill him as soon as he shows his face. Meanwhile Hobson's secretary, whom he has promised to marry, learns he is courting Enid Brand, niece of the boss. The secretary, Ruth Preston, leaves town—taking with her all Tim Hobson's money, gained by corruption and blackmail, and amounting to $450,000.

CHAPTER IX

Pick-Up

"WHERE have I met you?" asked the young woman.

Andy Adams, who was in a brown study, turned his head and observed for the first time the young woman who had been sitting beside him in the Farragut Street bus. His blue eyes opened wide and color rushed into his cheeks. He was sitting beside Enid Brand.

He smiled in spite of himself. "I'm sorry, but I don't think we have met," he said.

It was her turn to blush. "I suppose you think—"

"No, I don't," he assured her. "You're not like that."

Her brown eyes looked frankly into his. "Thanks." There is something familiar about you. I am Enid Brand."

"Tom Carty, Miss Brand. It's my loss."

It had never occurred to him that he would regret having deliberately disfigured a handsome face, but he felt a twinge at the thought of his present commonplace appearance.

The girl was smiling broadly. "I have it," she said. "I remember now. Only I couldn't tell you. It's so absurd, and you would be angry."

"I assure you I wouldn't."

"Did you read this morning's papers? About a burglary at William Brand's house."

Andy began to tremble inside. "Yes. You are that Miss Brand?"

She nodded. "Well, for a second, I thought—there was something—frankly you suggested the burglar. Isn't that funny?"

"Hadn't you better give me in charge?"

She leaned back in her seat and shook her head.

"You couldn't be a burglar," she said. "You are rather nice."

"Why, thanks. So are you. In what respect do I resemble your burglar?"

"I guess it's just your brown mustache."

"Oh, they often wear false beards and mustaches. Let me congratulate you, Miss Brand. According to the papers you were heroic."

"Rubbish. I fainted."

"But the papers said he choked you."

"He didn't. He took the gun away from me and laid me down very gently on the floor."

"But if you were in a faint—"

"I wasn't absolutely unconscious. More scared than anything."

"It must have been a horrible experience," said the burglar.

"It was thrilling. I'm rather unconventional."

"No?"

She nodded complacently. "For in-

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stance, I picked you up and got you into conversation."

"But you mistook me for your burglar."

"Anyway," said Enid, "I think it's silly if people meet somebody nice that they should pretend not to see them just because they haven't been introduced."

"Meaning I'm nice," he said in honest surprise.

ANDY ADAMS

"Yes. Kind of."

"I agree with you. I mean about conventions. However, you would be horribly offended if I presumed upon your emancipation and invited you to lunch."

"I suppose I would," said Enid. "Let's find out. Ask me."

"Will you have lunch with me?"

"Yes," she said, "only I pay my own check."

"I'll take you on any terms. How about Spoletto's? It's the best eating place in town, isn't it?"

"Don't you know?"

"I'm a recent arrival from New York."

"Oh, then I couldn't have met you, so I can't accept."

"Oh, but you have. I'm your burglar."

She chuckled. "Is burglary equivalent to an introduction?"

"Didn't he hold you in his arms and lay you down gently?"

"That's true. Spoletto's the next stop."

As Andy helped her down the steps of the bus he was marveling at what difference there was in girls. Adele would no more have scraped acquaintance with a stranger than she would have jumped over the moon, but this girl was equally a lady. No more harm in her than a kitten, yet she was superior to conventions.

He knew by experience that she was as brave as she was pretty, and as he touched her hand he felt a slight electric shock. What a fool he had been to let that surgeon tinker with his face for any reason whatever!

SHE tucked her little hand behind his elbow and prattled gayly as they walked a half block to Spoletto's. In the old days Andy had been a patron of the place when customers were inspected through a peep-hole in the front door. Now the place was free as air and anybody could enter, but the doorman with his gimlet eyes looked everybody over and the attendants were the same sinister individuals of speakeasy days.

Andy knew and despised Toni Spoletto and he stiffened when he came face to face with the big shot. Toni glanced at him indifferently, but his ugly face split in a welcoming smile as he recognized Miss Brand.

"This is Mr. Carty from New York, Toni," she said sweetly. "And we want a very nice lunch."

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"This way, Mr. Carty," said Spoletto eagerly. "Hi, Giuseppi, give these folks a good table.

The beauty and chivalry of Benton were lunching here. The big room was noisy with chatter which drowned the six-piece orchestra on the raised platform at the rear. Andy sat down opposite the charming girl and beamed on her. She gazed at him quizzically.

"Do you believe in vibrations?" she demanded.

"Certainly, if you do."

"Well, when I sat beside you your vibrations were friendly. I glanced at you and you seemed familiar. Yet somehow, I don't like your face. Somehow it doesn't seem to belong to you."

Darn female intuition!

"It's all I've got, even if it is ugly."

"It's queer. I don't like red-headed men, but I like you. And you ought to do something about that tooth. It disfigures your mouth. I'll send you to my dentist."

"That's good of you."

"I discovered a long time ago that personality hasn't anything to do with personal appearance. For example—she lowered her voice—"my uncle is an attractive man for his age and very kind, but I don't like him much. He repels me."

"Is my personality all right?" he asked anxiously.

"I'm here, aren't I? Oh, Giuseppi, just bring us the regular lunch and a pint of red wine."

The head waiter departed.

"I never met a girl like you before," he declared. "And it isn't your face, either. Oh, it's beautiful, but you simply exude winsomeness. Would you have killed that burglar?"

"I could have," she said calmly. "I'm a good shot and I wasn't frightened, but I thought maybe he was hungry. I fired in the air."

"You're an angel," he said huskily. "I—"

"On guard," she hissed. "My uncle."

In fact, Bill Brand had entered with another man, spied her and was bearing down upon her.

"Enid, really!" he said stiffly.

"Meet Mr. Carty, Uncle," she said

TOM CARTY

cheerfully. "An old friend from New York. We sort of bumped into each other and I made him take me to lunch."

Brand's face cleared and he extended his hand to Andy, who accepted it with well-concealed distaste. "Glad to know you. Have Enid bring you up to the house. After your experience last night, Enid, I supposed you would be ill in bed."

"Never felt better in my life," she chirped.

Spoletto laid his hand on Brand's shoulder. "About Andy Adams," he said in a stage whisper.

"Shut up," snarled Brand. He

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smiled frostily at Enid's escort. "I'll see you again, I hope," he remarked, and moved away with the proprietor of the place.

"You ought to diet," said the unusual Miss Brand. "You hadn't ought to have a double chin at your age. I really don't know why I like you."

"So long as you do," he said absently. Why on earth had Spoletto mentioned Andy Adams? Had he been recognized? Impossible. Then what interest could Brand have in the vanished newspaper managing editor? How could Andy know that his private conversation with a high Federal government official had leaked? Or that Brand rightly suspected that it was Andy Adams who had robbed his safe last night? But it gave him food for thought.

"What's your business?" the girl inquired.

"Eh? I'm a newspaper man."

"Are you working in Benton?"

Andy stiffened. That was an idea. As a reporter he could go anywhere without question, get on the inside of things.

"I'm going to try to get on one of the Benton papers," he said.

"Waiter," she called. "Please ask Mr. Brand to come back here a minute."

"What's the idea?"

She wagged her pretty head. "You'll see."

Brand left his table, rather disgruntledly, and crossed to that at which his niece was located.

"I'm busy, Enid," he said. "What's the matter?"

"Mr Carty's sister is a school friend of mine, Uncle, and he's an awfully good reporter and he'd like to work on a Benton paper, so I want you to give him notes to all the editors, please." He scowled, and stopped scowling when he met her imperious gaze.

"Mr. Brand," exclaimed Tom, "Don't mind her. I can call on the editors myself. I wouldn't presume—"

But Brand was studying him thoughtfully. The false-face looked to Bill like the countenance of a shrewd fellow, without too many scruples.

"What Enid says goes," he said with a grin. He drew a card from his pocket and scribbled something on it.

"Take it to Prince, publisher of the *Globe*," he said. "He'll fix you up. Any more orders, Enid."

"You're a dear," declared Miss Brand.

"Thank you very much, sir," said Andy.

"Don't mention it. And suppose you drop in at my office tomorrow about eleven. I'd like to have a talk with you."

"Now aren't you glad you met me!" exclaimed the girl when her uncle had returned to his table.

"I was glad before I met your uncle. You're very impulsive, aren't you?"

"Well," she said, "I've learned from long experience that whatever I do on impulse is right, and what I do after mature consideration is wrong, so I don't consider anything any more."

Andy's laugh rang out clear and free. "You are perfectly marvelous," he declared.

Enid finished her coffee. "And I have an impulse to leave now while you think so," she stated. "You can put me in a taxi and maybe I'll have an impulse to give you my telephone number."

"If you don't I'll find it for myself. Tell me something, are you Mr. Brand's niece or Mrs. Brand's?"

"What a queer question! My

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mother and Mrs. Brand were sisters. My folks died when I was a small child and Mr. Brand took me in. My real name is Muller.

"I thought so," he muttered. "Here, waiter."

"I'm paying my check, you know."

Andy laid a five-dollar bill on the plate.

"I bet your allowance is overdrawn right this minute," he remarked.

"We-ll," she admitted. "It's kind of low. But since we're going to be friends—"

"You bet we are."

As he was placing her in the taxi she had an impulse and gave him her telephone number.

Andy looked after the cab for a full minute. Somehow he didn't feel utterly alone in the world any more. And he was glad that there was no Brand blood in her.

CHAPTER X

The Hotel Fire

ANDY came out of his trance when a fire engine, its siren screaming, came tearing down the street. His nostrils quivered. Like many newspaper men he was a fire fanatic. It had begun when he was a leg-man on the old New York *World*. In Benton he had a fire alarm installed in his bedroom, and on a good many nights he had leaped out of bed and taxied to the scene of a battle between men and the most vicious of all the elements.

Three other pieces of apparatus followed the first, and the district chief's car, a flaming red, tore past. Andy turned into a drug store and called fire headquarters.

"Smith of the *Globe* speaking," he said. "Where's the fire?"

"Box 314," replied the department operator, and cut him off.

Andy knew the location of every box in the city and he still possessed his fire lines card. In his hasty departure from the newspaper he had forgotten to turn it in, and it reposed in his wallet.

Because he was a fire fan, and with no premonition that fate demanded his presence at that fire, Andy leaped into a taxi and told the driver to take him as near the corner of Blossom and Chambers Streets as possible.

There was a short ride across town and the taxi was blocked by a rapidly increasing crowd. Andy paid off and jumped out. He worked his way through the throng, observing that the fire was in an eight story hotel of the third class called the Savoy, and that smoke and flames were pouring from the windows of the fourth and fifth floors. Presently he came to a rope across the street with a policeman on guard to see that its meaning was respected. Andy crept under the rope, flashed his card upon the officer and ran toward the fire.

Four alarms had been sent in, and fire apparatus clogged the street in front of the hotel. A ladder truck was hoisting its extension ladder. Firemen with hose were going up on short ladders or dragging the heavy hose lines throught the entrance to the building.

Upon the upper floors, men and women were visible at windows, trapped by the fire on the floors below. Andy swore softly. The building should have been condemned years ago. It was built of brick and all its floors and beams were of wood. The heat on the lower floors would warp the walls. It wouldn't be long when the structure would collapse. Many lives would be lost; another count

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against the graft-ridden city government.

He secured an advantageous position and watched fascinated as the flames grew fiercer. Now the fire poured through windows left open and wrapped itself around the top of the extension ladder, which had reached the level of the fifth floor. It would be impossible to take those trapped on the top floors down on that ladder.

In fact, the fire chief, recognizing the fact, ordered the truck to move out of the reach of the flames. From those caught above, who had been watching the slow rise of the ladder hopefully, came wails of despair.

"Why don't they use the fire escapes?" muttered Andy. On the side of the hotel at the right there was a one-story garage, and an iron fire escape descended from the top floor of the hotel to the roof of the garage. So far the flames had not burst out through the windows on that side of the building. What was the matter with the lunk-headed firemen? Wait. They were on the job.

Two firemen appeared upon the fire escape landing on the seventh floor. One of them went down the iron stairs a few steps, the other drew a woman through the window and motioned to her to descend.

A second woman followed and then two children. The fireman on the ladder moved down backwards, encouraging the timid women to follow him. Somehow these brave fellows had managed to reach the upper floors, probably before the fire had gained its present headway.

It wouldn't be long before the flames would break out on that side of the hotel, but some of the people might be saved. Andy and the crowd watched, breathless; tense with excitement. Those who had been screaming from the front windows, disappeared. They had rushed to the place of escape. Now there were a dozen people creeping slowly down the series of ladders, and the fireman was still helping men, women and children through the window. The fireman at the bottom of the procession was now down to the fifth floor. At least a score of persons were creeping down the ladders.

It was an outrage that there was only a single series of fire escapes. A hotel with no better facilities should have been closed by the building department. But, if the wind which was blowing against that side of the hotel held back the flames, most of those trapped on the top floors would be saved.

Slowly the human line extended. It had reached the fourth floor. Only thirty feet below was the roof of the garage. The vast throng which watched was cheering lustily.

Andy counted thirty persons on the iron ladders. His sharp eyes noticed something. They distended in horror.

"Hi, Chief!" he shouted. He rushed toward Chief Grey, who stood in the middle of the street bellowing unheeded directions through his megaphone. But before Andy reached him —there was nothing which the chief could have done—the appalling catastrophe happened.

THE forty-year-old fire escape could not stand the strain. Its fastenings in old brick and ancient cement gave way. Before the horrified eyes of five thousand people, the fire escape tore away from the wall and fell with its human freight to the roof of the garage. For a second the air was full of screaming, falling men, women and children.

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Then there was a horrid thud of metal against the roof of the garage, which collapsed, and a series of lighter thuds as one poor body after another struck the shattered roof and disappeared into the interior of the building.

The cry from the multitude was even more heartrending than the death wails of the doomed. The human mass held back by the ropes at each end of the street surged forward, despite efforts of police and firemen.

And in the milling mob something was happening directly in front of Andy Adams.

"By God, I've got you!" cried a voice that was known to him. Andy tore his eyes from the garage.

"Where's my money, you damned thief!" bellowed Tim Hobson.

"Where you'll never find it," screamed the woman who was struggling in his arms.

Andy recognized her. It was Ruth Preston, Hobson's secretary.

"Give up or I'll send you to jail for twenty years," cried the lawyer.

"You won't dare! You daren't lift a finger against me, you lying snake!"

The multitude had swept down upon those within the firelines. It was screaming, shouting and actually striking at the unhappy firemen as though they were responsible for the collapse of the fire escape and the wholesale murder its fall had caused.

Andy Adams closed his right fist, and drove it against the head of Tim Hobson with all the force of a hundred seventy pounds. Tim went down without a sound and the crowd swept over him.

"Come on, now's your chance," said Andy to the young woman. He grasped her arm, shouldered aside the people about them, and, with great difficulty and not without a few blows and bruises, he worked his way to the sidewalk and pulled her into a doorway. The young woman fainted in his arms at that point and dropped a satchel to the ground. Andy supported her and picked up the satchel.

They were standing in the doorway of a restaurant whose patrons and em-

TIM HOBSON

ployees had poured into the street. He carried her inside, placed her in a chair, and taking water from a carafe wet a napkin and bathed her face. In a few seconds she came to. Outside there was a hideous din—of whistles, bells, and howls from the insane mob.

"Who are you?" demanded Ruth Preston.

"I'm a reporter from the *Globe*. You're Hobson's secretary, aren't you?"

"I was. I had trouble with him. I was hiding. I had a room on the third floor of that hotel and ran out into the street when the fire broke out. Oh, those poor people!"

"They were practically murdered by crooked politicians," said Andy. "What's the matter?"

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"Tim, don't shoot!" she screamed.

Andy whirled. Tim Hobson was bearing down upon them, a revolver in his hand. His eyes were bloodshot and wild, he was bleeding from a dozen cuts and scratches, his clothes were torn. He stopped a few feet from them, swaying as though drunk.

"You were two-timing me. That's why you robbed me," he snarled. "I'll fix you and your lover, damn you."

As he lifted his arm Andy hurled himself upon the man, knocking him over backward. Tim's revolver hand struck the wall as he fell and the weapon was knocked out of his grasp. He swore viciously, brought up his knee, and caught Adams in the groin. Andy winced with pain but drove both fists into the face of the man beneath him. Tim twisted, rolled him off, and was on top, a position of which he proceeded to take advantage. Andy was a good boxer, but Tim was a rough-and-tumble fighter who had been in many saloon brawls. For five minutes the newspaper man had his hands full.

Tim's ordinary smiling countenance was fiendish in its expression; his intention was to kill. They rolled, embraced, kicking, kneeing. Hobson attempted to gouge. They knocked over chairs, tables, smashed glassware and crockery. Andy had a glimpse of the girl crouching in a corner, her satchel clutched tightly in both hands. Then his head struck heavily against a metal spittoon.

"Got you," snarled Tim Hobson. He reached for a heavy water carafe lying on its side within reach of his right arm. He had Andy pinned to the floor with his left at the throat. Andy was dazed, aware of what was going to happen, unable to prevent it. The carafe was lifted on high. Andy closed his eyes and waited for the blow.

It was never delivered. Ruth Preston picked a full quart bottle of whiskey off the bar, rushed to the aid of her champion and brought the bottle down with all her might upon the head of Tim Hobson.

CHAPTER XI

Beware of Tim Hobson

THE bottle shattered and Tim toppled over and lay still. Andy slowly and laboriously got up on his feet to see the girl disappearing through the exit.

"Stop, Miss Preston!" he cried. He staggered to his feet. He was bruised, horribly weary from the prolonged battle, dizzy from the collision of his head with the spittoon. The woman was gone. Indifferent to his late antagonist who lay on his back, hors de combat, he pursued her. But the mob blocked the street from curb to curb, impeding the work of rescue and the battle with the flames, and the girl had disappeared. No more chance of catching her than finding a needle in a haystack.

"The hotel is going to fall! Run for your lives!"

This came stentoriously and harshly through the megaphone of the fire chief. At the same instant the riot squad charged the crowd from the upper end of the street. Andy glanced at the hotel. The flames were now at the sixth floor, but it wasn't likely that the building would collapse for ten or fifteen minutes. It was a good ruse to clear the streets, and it was working.

Andy was carried by the human tide into a cross street, and gradually worked his way out of the district, found a taxicab and went to his room at the Benton Hotel. His clothes were torn, but he had no cuts, fortunately.

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There was a lump on the back of his head which hurt considerably, and that was the extent of the damage received in the brawl.

He didn't think Hobson had suffered more than a concussion and lacerations of the scalp from the bottle Ruth Preston had broken over his head. It would have been a pity if Tim had been killed. Andy expected to reach Brand through Hobson. The lawyer's dissolute habits were the weak links in the criminal chain. Get Tim in a tight place and he would squeal on Brand. And it was a break that he and his secretary were enemies. Tim's secretary must have enough on Tim to hang him. Hiding out on him. Stealing his money. Well, Andy would have to find the girl, and, this time, make her talk.

On the other hand, Tim Hobson had had a good look at the new Andy Adams whose alias was Tom Carty. That was bad. As Sam Graham had said, as soon as they got a line on Tom Carty, he would be as much up against it as Andy Adams had been. And he had swapped a good face for an indifferent one for no purpose.

Outside the newsboys were shouting fire extras. Andy's blood began to boil. They would scream editorially about the worthless fire escape. They would demand punishment for those responsible for the death of the unfortunates who had fallen with it. There would be an official investigation and the head of the building department and several inspectors would be discharged. Prosecution of those responsible would begin and be dropped as soon as the hue and cry had died down. And fifty other unsafe hotels and apartment buildings would be permitted to remain in business until other horrible accidents destroyed them one by one.

The system must be smashed. A fearless newspaper could do it, but there were no fearless newspapers in Benton. It was up to Andy.

TIM HOBSON woke up in the hospital. His head was bandaged and he felt awful, but his cunning mind was functioning as usual.

"What happened to you, Mr. Hobson?" demanded a reporter from the *Globe*.

"I was inside the fire lines," said Tim. "I saw the fire escape fall and was frozen with horror. Young man, quote me as saying that the inspectors who failed to inspect that fire escape must be given the works."

"Yes, Mr. Hobson. But what happened to you?"

"The crowd broke through the lines and I took refuge in a café opposite. Its employees had gone out and two men were robbing the place. I tried to stop them. There was a fight and I got knocked out. I'll be back in my office tomorrow or next day, won't I, nurse?"

"Well, maybe, in a week," qualified the trained nurse.

"Why bother about me when those poor people are dying," said Tim piously. "What was the death list, young fellow?"

"Of twenty-four people on the ladder, twenty-one are dead, one is dying and two may recover, their fall having been broken by striking other bodies."

Tim's eyes filled with tears. "Horrible. Horrible. I offer my services free of charge to any of the survivors and to the relatives of the dead who may want them. Free of charge. I consider it a public duty."

"Why, that's fine, Mr. Hobson."

Tim smiled. "I never suffered so

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poignantly in my life as when I saw them fall to their deaths. I try to be a good citizen, young man."

"Who is responsible, Mr. Hobson?" asked the nurse when the reporter had departed.

"The building department."

"And who is responsible for the building department?" she asked.

Tim sighed. "I'm very tired, nurse. I want to go to sleep." She tiptoed out, but he didn't sleep.

Ruth Preston probably had babbled all Tim's little secrets to the red-headed man who had persuaded her to make off with Tim's bank vault deposits. Sending her trunk to New York was a ruse. Hadn't left town. Figured Tim wouldn't dare to have her arrested lest she tell how he got the money she was accused of having stolen.

Time for stern measures. The pair were too dangerous to be at large, or for that matter alive. No time to lose. He'd have to get out of this hospital as quickly as possible.

CHAPTER XII

The Observant Mouse

MISS MURCH, the secretary of the managing editor of the *Globe,* was a small, slender young woman who might have been good looking if she had taken a little trouble with herself. She had a small, round face, so her bow spectacles gave her an owl-like appearance. She had ash-blond hair which she wore in a short bob. She disfigured a good figure by cheap dark dresses which fitted her only approximately. Of her thirty dollars a week ten went into a savings bank. Miss Murch, in six years, had been secretary to four managing editors, and the only one whose departure she mourned was Andy Adams.

Andy had a winning smile and an easy manner. He was impulsive, boyish, and a swell newspaper man. Miss Murch was for him very much.

Jack Finch, the new managing editor, was a nice chap; but the job was too big for him in Sally Murch's opinion. There was no more severe critic of the make-up and contents of the paper than the managing editor's secretary, and in four weeks it had gone off.

She was taking dictation, the morning after the Savoy Hotel horror, when the door opened and she heard a familiar footfall. A pleasurable sensation ran through Miss Murch. For a second she thought Andy Adams was coming back to push Jack Finch out of his chair. She glanced up and felt a shock of disappointment. It wasn't Andy Adams.

"Note for you, sir, from Mr. Prince," said the intruder. Jack motioned to Miss Murch and she crossed the room to the typewriter desk on the other side. The man who came in had red hair and a brown mustache and a bump on his nose. He was heavier and taller than Andy Adams, and his voice was different.

"Sit down. Take a chair," said the managing editor. The newcomer seated himself in the chair just vacated by Miss Murch.

"What experience have you had?" asked Finch.

"Well, I put in a year on the old *World* in New York, a couple of years on the *Sun* in Baltimore. I've had a lot of court and police experience."

The stranger turned the left side of his face to Miss Murch, which was not the side upon which the enlarged bicuspid distorted his mouth. The corner on this side turned up in the whimsical manner of the late Andy Adams. She must be going nuts.

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The phone rang. Finch answered it. "Sit right here," he said to the visitor. "Back in a minute."

He left the room. The stranger drew out a cigarette and lighted it. It dropped from the left corner of his mouth in a familiar manner. She affected to be absorbed in her shorthand notes, but she was studying him intently.

The phone rang again. "Answer it, please. Take a message," said Miss Murch. "I'm busy."

He picked up the phone. "Mr. Finch is out of the room for the moment," he said in answer to an inquiry. "Certainly. What name? And the telephone number?"

He jotted some notes down on a sheet of copy paper with Finch's pencil. The girl was standing over him as he finished. She reached across him and picked up the sheet of paper.

"And just what is your little game, Mr. Adams?" she asked caustically.

"EH? The name is Tom Carty," he said in great confusion.

"But the handwriting is Andy Adams," she retorted. "Off guard, eh? I thought I'd catch you. I don't know what you've done to yourself but it's certainly no improvement. Where's the masquerade, Mr. Adams? How would you like me to show Mr. Finch this sample of Mr. Carty's handwriting?"

He turned and smiled at her beseechingly.

"I'm at your mercy, Miss Murch," he said in his natural voice.

Sally Murch stared at him sorrowfully. "You ought to be shot for disfiguring yourself, you idiot," she said finally. "And I'm being paid by the *Globe*. Talk quick or I'll give you away."

"Meet me for lunch and I'll tell you everything," he pleaded. "For heaven's sake give me a break till then."

Sally pursed her lips. "It was one of my ambitions to be taken to lunch by Mr. Adams. The Benton Hotel Grill at twelve-thirty."

"How the devil did you get onto me?"

"You forget I was with you every day for a couple of years. Shh!"

Jack Finch came back into the room. "Oh, Carty," he said. "I told Mr. Gilbert, the city editor, to put you on day police. We really don't need you, but the publisher practically ordered me to give you a job. That's all."

Slightly consoled because his former city editor didn't know him, Andy went into the city room, met the new city editor, who had been telegraph editor in Andy's reign, agreed to report at 8 A.M. At police headquarters. Then Andy hastened to keep his appointment with William Brand.

While he had been managing editor, Andy had been paying ardent attention to Adele Stover and had found Miss Murch efficient but no more interesting than her typewriter. To have the mouse-like young woman first trap him and then lay down the law to him was disconcerting. He would have to take her into his confidence to some extent and risk being betrayed. As she said, she worked for the *Globe* and owed Prince her allegiance.

He waited ten minutes in Brand's outer office and was then told to go in. Brand did not invite him to be seated and kept him standing another five minutes before he gave him his attention.

"Get a job on the *Globe?*" he asked curtly.

"Yes, sir. Thank you."

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"Good." Brand leaned back in his chair. "You look like a sensible fellow interested in the main chance. Right?"

Andy nodded.

"I may have an opportunity to give you something on the side which will augment your income. Can you keep your mouth shut?"

"Yes, sir."

"Hump. I'm a good judge of men," he said. "You're no better than you should be. You'll soon learn that what I say goes in this town. What was your graft in New York?"

"I was a reporter, sir."

"Well, you may be useful in one way or another. Frankly, I don't care for you as a companion of my niece. You're not in her class, young man, and I won't have you hanging round her. Something will drop on you if you ignore my wishes."

Andy boiled but kept his composure. After all, Brand had to look after Enid and Tom Carty was an unprepossessing individual. Because Brand had sized him up as a crook he had acceded to Enid's request to find the young man a job, but, as a guardian, he was right to object to his friendship with Miss Brand.

"I won't pursue Miss Brand, sir," he stated.

"That's all, then. You may hear from me in a day or a week or a month."

CHAPTER XIII

Lunch at the Benton Grill

'WELL, have I got to pull your nose?" asked a sharp voice.

Andy stared in astonishment at the young woman who had accosted him so surprisingly. Miss Murch had managed somehow to change to a pretty street dress. She had on a becoming hat and the disfiguring glasses were gone. Also her hair was fluffed and very charming. She looked like a girl from the River Boulevard in town for lunch.

"Are you sure you are you?" he demanded.

Her eyes sparkled. She was repaid for pretending to be sick and securing two hours in which to make the transformation in herself.

"Sarah Murch, at your service, Mr.

ENID BRAND

—er—Carty." She had nice teeth, he observed. Most likely she always had had them.

"This way, your ladyship?"

The headwaiter sat them in a corner of the grillroom, and Sally gazed at him expectantly.

"There hasn't been any war," she remarked, "so your face couldn't have been shot away. And it isn't a mask you are wearing, I suppose."

"I'm going to be frank with you, Miss Murch," he said earnestly. "It wasn't a war but a steamroller. I went to New York. There was an—er—powder explosion."

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She rose. "I'm going to phone Mr. Prince," she said stiffly. He sighed. "Sit down. I'm going to place my life in your hands."

"I'll use my judgment about what I do with it," she said, still incensed.

"Okay, Miss Murch, my fiancée's father was murdered. You know that Adele was killed when she heard the news."

"Yes," she said softly. "I know."

"A filthy gang of criminals are responsible for both their deaths. I had nothing to live for. I had made threats. I was going to be put out of the way. You know how they had me kicked off the *Globe*. They offered me a large sum of money to leave town. I took it to use it against them when I came back.

"If I came back as Andy Adams I'd live a couple of hours. Well, smashing these murderers was all I wanted and if they got me what of it? I went to a plastic surgeon and had my appearance changed so I could last long enough to accomplish what has to be done to clean up the city."

"You're a quixotic fool," she said harshly. "But you are sort of wonderful. To sacrifice—"

"No sacrifice. My job is all that interests me."

"You're just a boy. You ought to be ashamed of yourself," she said passionately. "A kid trick."

He shrugged his shoulders. "You can finish me with a word."

"What's the idea of going back on the *Globe?*"

"If I stay in town, I must have a job. As a reporter I have an excuse for going into strange places."

"You're after Brand, of course," she said thoughtfully.

"Brand, Hobson and the whole gang."

She looked very serious. "I read what happened at the hotel fire. They are responsible for that. I won't give you away, Andy."

"You're one swell egg," he said gratefully.

"Can you get your old face put back?" she asked anxiously.

"It will never be the same," he said, smiling mournfully.

"Look—Brand!" she exclaimed. "He's just come in. And the mayor is with him."

"I'd give a lot to know what they're going to talk about."

"The Prince," she remarked. "He's with them."

"Birds of a feather."

The mayor, the boss and the publisher of the newspaper passed the young couple, and Brand, who saw everything, did not fail to recognize the new reporter. He glanced sharply at the young woman, saw that it was not his niece, and lost interest. Prince passed his managing editor's secretary without observing her, which was a tribute to her costume and the arrangement of her hair. They went on into a smaller dining room.

THE mayor of Benton was a fussy little man with gold spectacles, white hair, and a paunch. He ordered luncheon and then gazed apprehensively at William Brand.

"A petition signed by five hundred taxpayers was presented to me this morning," he stated. "They oppose the river tunnel bond issue on account of the financial condition of the city, and claim the tunnel is not needed and won't be needed for years."

"My dear Mr. Mayor," said Prince pompously, "the Federal government is spending billions looking to the future and to provide employment, and

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Benton must do her part. I am supporting the bond issue because it will provide work for thousands of our unemployed."

The mayor sighed. "It will pass the council tomorrow night. I shall sign it, of course."

Brand grinned sardonically. "Two public-spirited citizens," he commented. "Well, gentlemen, I think it advisable to hold up the bond issue for a time."

The mayor looked tremendously relieved. He was a man who would have been honest if it had been profitable.

"Look here, Brand," exclaimed Prince. "The bank is ready to put up the money. Don't you think delay might be dangerous in the present economic situation?"

"The bank will put up the money when and if," said the city boss. "I have excellent reasons for holding up the bond issue. Tell your petitioners that you have delayed things to permit further study, Mr. Mayor. Prince, Andy Adams is somewhere in Benton. Ask your staff to locate him and let me know where he is?"

"But Adams is nobody. Why bother about him?"

"I want him. I've the police combing the town for him. Your reporters may be helpful."

"I'll send down word to find him, that I want to see him. He may think I'll give him back his job."

"That's a good idea. Get him into your office and hold him until I can get in touch with him. Thanks, old man."

Prince frowned. "What is your real reason for holding up the bond issue? You know it's risky. What's the hitch?"

"Nothing I care to discuss, gentlemen," said Brand. "You'll excuse me now. I have an engagement."

Prince gazed after the departing boss intently. "Is he scared about something, I wonder?" he muttered. "Well, what was it you said, Mr. Mayor?"

CHAPTER XIV

Mrs. Hatton of Murdock Street

POLICE headquarters in Benton were located in a dingy gray stone building next to the city jail and municipal court building on Water Street. There was a room in the basement set aside for the police reporters which contained half a dozen wooden chairs and three or four seedy typewriter desks with ancient typewriters.

Andy presented himself at 8 A.M. and found himself alone in the place until 9, when Jones of the *Record* drifted in with Huston of the *Item* at his heels.

"A red-headed guy," remarked Jones, whom Andy had fired from the *Globe* a year before for drinking too much. "Taking Stone of the *Globe's* place?"

Andy nodded. "He started on his vacation today."

"That's his desk in the corner."

Jones seated himself at his own desk and put his feet on it. Obviously he had no suspicion that he had been talking with his former managing editor. Huston nodded and sat down and began to read a magazine.

"What's your name, feller?" demanded Jones.

"Tom Carty."

"Well, Carty, somebody has to work round here. We have a combination. This week you're it. Go up and hang round the front office, read the tissues, and if there's anything hot, bring it down to us."

Andy nodded. "Okay."

He went upstairs, introduced him-

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self to the police captain in charge, met a lieutenant and a sergeant, and sprawled on a bench. There was much telephoning, and the sergeant handed him a sheet of routine reports. Andy read them, yawned, and went over and stuck them on a hook with a mass of others. Half an hour crawled by before a name caused him to prick up his ears.

"Sure, Mr. Hobson. I'll call Captain Green. Hi, Captain! Tim Hobson on the phone from the hospital."

The fat, red-faced police captain picked up the phone.

"Hello, Tim," he said cordially. "Hear you got beat up. Hear they've been busy picking broken glass out of your conk."

He laughed at Tim's reply.

"Fat chance a robber would have with you around. No offense, Mr. Hobson . . ."

"No, sir, we've been watching all stations. She ain't got out of town unless she went in an automobile . . . Sure . . . No, we won't make an arrest. We'll take her address. When are they going to let you out?"

"Well, you certainly got a hard head if you get out today. Yeah, it was a terrible fire. They found three bodies in the ruins aside from those that fell into the garage. I read you're going to give your services for nothing. That's fine, Tim."

He hung up.

"Great guy, Tim Hobson," he said. "Big hearted. I seen him crying like a child when his car run over a kid last year. He's still taking care of that kid, too. And does he spend his money free!"

"The way he gets it, he can afford to," said the lieutenant grumpily.

"You should pan Tim Hobson," the captain said scornfully.

"Oh, I ain't panning him, but he makes barrels of dough. Why shouldn't he spend it?"

"Well, that's right. Know him, Carty?"

Andy shook his head. "Heard of him. Never met him."

"Make his acquaintance. Many's the fifty bucks he's slipped a reporter."

"I sure will," said Andy, grinning. What a break that he had landed the police job! If they found Ruth Preston, her address would come through this office and maybe he could beat Tim Hobson to the wire.

"Does he ever come down here?" he inquired.

"Well, mostly at night."

Hours dragged by, and finally it was lunch time. With all he had to do, it was unfortunate that he was tied up all day at police headquarters, but his nights would be free. If he got no sleep at night, there was plenty of time for it in the reporter's room.

So the blackmailer would be at large this afternoon. It was up to Andy to keep out of his way.

During the afternoon he phoned in a few unimportant news items and read two or three old magazines in the reporter's room. He had to phone all three newspapers, as the other two reporters had departed for the races, coolly commanding the new man to cover them on whatever turned up.

At five o'clock he went up to the front office for a final visit. His arrival was well timed.

"Hi, Captain," the sergeant shouted. "Murphy phoned in that Preston dame's address a couple of hours ago, but Lieutenant Casey forgot to report it. I've been trying to get Hobson at the hospital, but they let him out an hour ago and he ain't at his office or his home."

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Captain Green was half laying, half sitting at his big desk in the far corner of the room.

"Give it to Carty to bring over here. This is not to be published, Carty. Private job we're doing for Tim."

"Right," said Carty. He took the report sheet from the sergeant and let his eye fall on it as he crossed the room. Murphy knew and had recognized Ruth Preston in a cheap lunch place on the west side. He had trailed her to 456 Murdock Street, apartment 7. Her name there was Mrs. Hatton.

He handed the slip to Captain Green. "You can always get Tim about six o'clock at the Wolf Tavern," Green called to the sergeant. "He drinks about six cocktails there and goes to dinner. Call him at six and put me on the line. He'll be glad to hear this piece of news."

"Heigh ho," yawned Carty. "Time for me to knock off."

"I suppose so," said the sergeant enviously. "Seeing you ain't done nothing all day."

ANDY grinned and departed. Outside he hailed a taxi and in fifteen minutes he descended before the address of the fugitive. The front door was not locked and he ascended two dark flights of stairs in a very shabby old brick house which had been converted to apartments. He knocked on the door of No. 7. No answer. After knocking several times without response, he descended to the street, walked a half block, and stepped into a doorway.

An hour dragged by; an hour and a half. A small closed car came up the street and stopped on the opposite side. It was quite dark when he saw Ruth Preston turn a corner below him and walk swiftly toward him. He recognized her by her trim figure. The women who had passed during his long watch were frowzy.

She turned in at her door. A second later the motor car door disgorged two men who quickly crossed the street and entered the same doorway. Too late. Tim Hobson had been notified of her whereabouts.

Andy was at their heels as they disappeared inside, but he hesitated. Houses of this type were compelled by law to have a fire escape—probably an unsafe one, but it ought to bear one person's weight. There was an alley behind the house. He turned into it.

If Tim was going to have a talk with Ruth Preston, what they said would be worth hearing, and in this weather the windows were sure to be open.

Andy hastened down the alley, came to a door in a wooden fence, pushed it open and found himself in a disreputable back yard. As he had surmised, there was a fire escape. He swung himself up to the first landing. The window which opened upon it was dark. So was the second floor window, but there was a light on the third floor, the window of which must admit to Ruth Preston's apartment.

As he passed the second floor he heard a stifled scream and a woman's voice saying, "No, no, no." He rushed up the ladder until his head was upon the level of the lighted window on the third floor. It was open and uncurtained. Beyond the back yard there was a vacant lot and the occupant felt safe from prying eyes. He peered inside.

It was a shabby bedroom, rather large, and there was an open door leading, he supposed, to a living room, but he had no interest just then for details.

There was the broad back of a man between the window and the double

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bed. A second man, on the other side of the bed, held Ruth Preston flat upon it. She had been thrown down, apparently, just after she had entered, for she was wearing a light coat and a hat. The fellow had her by the throat with his left hand. He struck her in the face with his clenched fist. Blood spurted from her nose.

"Come through, where is it?" he growled.

"The—the satchel at the bottom of the closet," she gasped.

"Cover her," commanded the woman-beater. He released her and straightened up. He was a squat, flat-faced man with pig eyes and a brutal mouth.

Andy was standing on the landing, tense, ready to spring.

The man with his back to the window lifted a revolver with a silencer on it.

"Lay down there," rumbled the fellow. "Keep quiet."

The girl, who had attempted to spring up, fell back on the bed. She had been hit several times. A cut over her right eye was bleeding, and her nose was bleeding profusely. She beat against the quilt impotently with clenched fists.

Andy's temper flamed. He stepped upon the window sill, crouching and tensing his muscles.

"Got it," called the fellow who had gone into the closet. "Let her have it."

Andy was flying through the air. He proposed to land on the back of the man between him and the bed, wrest the weapon from his hand, and take command of the situation. But the situation was out of control. The fellow with the revolver, who had been covering the girl, pulled the trigger. A bullet struck her in the breast. There was a slight, muffled report.

Crash. Andy had landed. The killer went down under him, dropping his weapon in his surprise. Andy, insane with rage, grasped the weapon and beat the man savagely upon the head with it.

"Get her?" inquired the beast in the closet. He appeared. He took in the situation in a flash and reached for a weapon.

Andy, on his knees beyond the bed, fired one shot. The fellow pitched forward and fell heavily. Andy was up and around the bed. He stepped over the body of the man he had shot and bent over the girl. The bullet had hit her in the left side, at the heart. She had died instantly. Poor, pretty, unhappy Ruth Preston! She was a horrid spectacle. No matter what she had done, she hadn't deserved this. Andy emitted a snarl like a wolf.

"Damn you," muttered the man he had beaten with his own revolver. He was on his feet swaying, his hands curled like claws; his bestial face twisted in a grimace of hate. He had done this frightful thing—shot the girl in cold blood as she lay here helpless.

Andy lifted the revolver and fired two shots into the chest of the man, four feet distant. He went over backwards, and as he fell his coat flew open and revealed a police badge of the City of Benton.

"Lord Almighty!" gasped Andy Adams.

BOTH men were unknown to him, but the situation was plain. Hobson had sent the two criminal cops after his unfortunate secretary. They were not murderous thugs, but members of the police force. Though they were black-hearted scoundrels they were under the ægis of the city. And Andy, who had entered to

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protect a defenseless woman, was in deadly peril.

A silencer on a police revolver—that was evidence of criminal intent, police or no. What was he to do?

The girl was beyond aid. If there was a spark of life in her murderers, he didn't care. Let them die. What had they come here to take from Ruth Preston? There lay in the closet doorway where the second officer had dropped it, a satchel. It was the black satchel which Ruth had been carrying when Hobson had pounced on her outside the burning hotel. Evidence against Hobson. He picked it up. It was not heavy.

This was all right but, if he were caught here, he'd go to the chair beyond the shadow of a doubt. Hobson and Brand would cover everything. He would be accused of a triple murder. The satchel would vanish, and nobody would believe his statement of the facts. He stepped over one of the bodies and reached the window. Best go as he had come, by the fire escape.

The room was a shambles—the memory of it would be grafted on his mind forever. He was shaking with horror and anxiety. Fortunately the rooms on the second and ground floors were still untenanted and he dropped, unseen, from the bottom landing to the yard.

The alley feathered out in a vacant lot. Better cross it and gain a back street. For all he knew there might be a chauffeur in the car out front who was waiting for the police murderers to come out. He would have a long wait. Andy, carrying the satchel, walked swiftly across the vacant lot and arrived at a street running parallel to Murdock. He walked a block and took a taxi. He told the chauffeur to take him to the railroad station. At the station he took another taxi to the River Boulevard, and changed to a third to take him to his hotel.

These precautions he took instinctively. His mind was in a turmoil in which horror and rage predominated. A young helpless woman had been shot to death before his eyes. Her expression as the police brute fired was indelibly painted on his brain, and he exulted that he had administered quick execution to her murderers. He ardently wished the debonair Tim Hobson had been present, so that he could shoot him down. And Brand!

But by the time he reached the hotel, he began to think of himself. He had no desire to be convicted of the murder of the police detectives. There was important work to be done before he gave up the ghost. He weighed his chances of escape. He thought they were reasonably good. He was certain nobody had seen him ascend or descend the fire escape. It might be many hours before the bodies in the fourth floor chamber were discovered.

He hadn't given the hotel address to the last taxi driver, and he let him drive a block beyond before he descended. As he stepped out he remembered the satchel, which he had placed in the seat beside him. He reached for it, paid the driver and turned down a side street upon which was the ladies' entrance to the hotel. It occurred to him that the satchel might be described by those who had seen it carried by Ruth Preston and his possession of it might be damning. Yet he couldn't dispose of it before he had inspected its contents.

Fortunately there was not even a porter at the ladies' entrance, and the elevator inside the door was at an upper floor. He went up three flights by the staircase, encountered no one,

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and breathed deeply with relief when he found himself in his room. He tossed the satchel upon his bed and wiped the cold sweat from his forehead.

CHAPTER XV

What Was in the Satchel

THE killer of the detectives would be sought for with all the energy which the police department possessed. If they caught him, he didn't have a chance. Yet Andy had come to the rescue of a woman in distress. He had slain the brutes in self-defense—well, not exactly. He had slain them in a burst of righteous fury. However, they would have murdered him out of hand. He had no regret, though he had much apprehension.

The poor girl! Why had they killed her when they had secured what Hobson had sent them to find?

Because Hobson was afraid she might talk. She probably had enough on him to ruin him. She had told Hobson the day of the fire that he dared not have her arrested. If only Andy had been a second sooner, the girl, in her anger at the savage who had sent men to rob and murder her, would have told him everything—enough perhaps to convict both Brand and Hobson of murder and blackmail.

Which recalled him to his possession of the bag. It was a leather satchel about fourteen inches long by eight inches broad. He picked it up and inspected it. Locked. He drew a gold penknife from his waistcoat pocket, slit the bag near the handle, and thrust in his hand. He drew forth a packet of bank notes. Excitedly he began to empty the bag. It was full of money. Hundred-dollar notes, five-hundred dollar notes. Thousand-dollar notes, tightly packed. The pile on the bed grew. An enormous sum of money. When the bag was empty, he sat down on the side of the bed and counted it excitedly. Twenty thousand, fifty thousand, a hundred thousand, two hundred thousand. Four hundred thousand. And fifty thousand more. In cash. In worn bills.

It made Andy Adams dizzy.

The largest sum of money which he had ever possessed was the five thousand paid him by Hobson as a bribe to get out of town. His salary, in the past, had been spent almost as soon as he received it, and he never had made big money.

Nearly half a million dollars with no owner.

The girl had stolen the money. It explained why the lawyer had lost his poise and pounced upon her like a madman when he encountered her in the crowd outside the burning hotel. And why he had been ready to kill when he followed Andy and the girl into the little café opposite the hotel. Tim thought they had the money.

It explained why he wanted her out of the way even if the money was recovered by his two tools. Hobson had stolen the money. From whom? Well, he had taken a hundred thousand from Rudolph Ranger. The Italian tenor had contributed. And a good many others. No doubt Tim Hobson has squandered as much as this during the last year on race horses and women. It was out of the question to return it to Hobson, the murderer. But it didn't belong to Andy. Not for a single second did he consider keeping it.

It did occur to him that he could get out of Benton tonight with the fortune which lay on the bed and live in luxury for the rest of his life in pleasant parts of the world. He could do that and

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leave the deaths of John Stover and his fiancée Adele unpunished. And he didn't consider it.

A bellboy might come in. He bolted his door. Already possession of a vast fund was troubling him. What to do with it? How dispose of it?

And Andy, suddenly, threw back his head and laughed. Sinews of war. Like the five thousand which had enabled him to pay the plastic surgeon and bring him back to Benton so changed that nobody knew him. With this money he could meet bribery with bribery, corruption with corruption. Beat the devil at his own game with his own money. It was a delicious idea.

And, when the game was won, he would send Rudolph Ranger the hundred thousand of which he had been mulcted and contribute the balance remaining to the families of those killed by the falling fire escape of the Savoy Hotel.

In the meantime, it couldn't remain here, and it was too bulky to be disposed of easily. Suddenly, he jumped clean off the floor. His telephone had rung. He gazed from the money to the telephone and back again. Had they trailed him so quickly?

IT was ringing insistently. Who would call him at this time of night? His eyes fell upon the electric clock kindly supplied by the management to every bedchamber in the house. Why, it was only eight in the evening.

He picked up the telephone. A woman's voice.

"Is there any possibility that this could be Thomas Carty?" inquired a pert, cute, unmistakable little voice.

Andy laughed hysterically.

"None other, Miss Brand," he said shakily.

"What's the matter? You sound queer."

"I'm so astonished. Please forgive me."

"You see it was like this," she said. "I had an impulse."

"Fortunate impulse."

"I was just wondering if a person whom I met rather unconventionally might have given me a false address."

"Did you really think that likely?"

"Well, not very. I presume you are tremendously busy."

"I'll cease to be."

"I'm an orphan," she said pathetically. "Uncle and Aunt have left me all alone in this big house."

"Except for six or eight servants," he said, much amused.

"Are servants people? How would you like to come out and call on me?"

He hesitated.

"I'm about to ring off and never, never call you again."

"I'm coming," he assured her. Why not? Brand's house was the last place where they would look for him.

"Well, hurry up. I'm lonesome."

She did ring off. He was smiling when he set down the telephone.

A wonderful kid! If his heart wasn't dead and buried, he would be thrilled to have won the friendship of such a delightful girl. And pooh-pooh to Sarah Murch, who said that his face was impossible; and to Enid's uncle who had sized him up for a crook. He would go. This once. A sweet interlude. His eyes fell upon the pile of money, but now he had an inspiration.

He ran to the closet, pulled out a suitcase, emptied its contents and thrust satchel and cash inside. He covered them with a bathrobe and some shoes to give the suitcase a proper weight, locked it—and his problem was solved.

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He then entered the bath room to wash. To his dismay he saw blood on his wrist and on the cuff of his white shirt. Ruth Preston's blood, poor miserable girl.

He pulled off his clothes and stepped under the shower, which made him feel better. He then inspected his clothing carefully, but a triangle of blood on the shirt cuff was the only stain he could find. He unlocked his suitcase and thrust the shirt inside. If they found the suitcase with the satchel and the money they might as well find the blood-stained shirt. The jig would be up.

He was trembling with excitement as he dressed, but he dressed carefully. In ten minutes he was ready for the street. Picking up the suitcase, he left the room, went down in the elevator and took a taxi to the Central Station. There he checked his fortune in greenbacks and other evidence to convict him of murder. In a place like that, the attendants were too busy to rob luggage or to notice how long it was left on their hands.

He gave the address of William Brand to another taxi, and grinned to observe the respect with which it was received. He leaned back on the cushions, completely relaxed. For the time being everything was all right. He was safe. Close to success.

Brand of course would be furious if he learned that the new reporter on the *Globe* had called on his niece, but an evening with Enid was worth some risk. It was curious that the little girl had been attracted rather than repelled by his appearance. She was sophisticated enough. It means that she had keen vision and a heart of gold. Thank God she was not a blood relative of Brand's!

There intruded into his complacent reverie an appalling recollection. He had dropped the revolver with the silencer when he picked up the satchel. It lay there in the room. And his finger-prints probably were upon it.

CONTINUE THIS STORY NEXT WEEK

Gunmen Pursue Man to Police Station

GUNMEN drove alongside James Dugan, business agent for the Painters Union in Chicago, as he returned from the wake of Toy Thompson, a fellow union official, who had fallen under a killer's gun. Dugan ducked low behind the wheel of his car, stepped on the gas, and pulled ahead. A machine gun chattered. Slugs riddled his car and buzzed past him.

Zig-zagging at wild speed he made for the Deering police station several blocks distant. The machine gun kept chattering a hundred feet behind him.

Skidding to a stop at the police station, Dugan leaped from his car and ran for the green lights. The gunmen raced past, delivering a final burst of lead as he sprinted up the station house steps. Their marksmanship was poor. He was untouched.

—*Emory Black*

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"Good God, Arnold," he said thickly, "I thought you were joking!"

Can You Spot the One Clue That Will Break the Case of the Foot-Print on the Side of a Dead Man's House? You Can if You Are

Too Dumb to Be Fooled

By Robert Arthur

THIS is why I am peeved at Solly Evans.

It is a big murder, this murder of Andrew Jenkins. Solly and I, Sergeant Ed Gore, are doing our morning patrol tour in L. C. P. P. C. 33, which is Lake City Police Patrol Car 33.

Being only a ordinary officer, Solly is driving. Being a sergeant, I am thinking.

Solly is a big, thick mug with a flat, expressionless pan, and even for a cop he is dumb. But I do not mind; he is a good driver, and I have the brains.

And then, when we are just at the corner of High Road and North Boulevard, the radio starts in.

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"Calling Car 33," it says. "Calling Car 27. Calling Car 41. Go at once to 1717 North Boulevard. Signal thirty. Signal thirty. Calling Car 33. . . ."

We had to slow for traffic at the turn. Before we pick up speed again I see a guy dashing down a lawn for us. It is Anderson Hopkins, who is Lake City's D. A. He hops on our running-board.

"Make it snappy, men!" he yells. "Thirty is murder! And it's Andrew Jenkins' home. Let's go!"

Solly puts one big foot on the accelerator, and 33 leaps like a jackrabbit kicked in the pants.

This Andrew Jenkins is a big shot business man in Lake City. He owns a couple of big factories. He has a million dollars, a heart of granite, and two sons, Hank and Arnold. Arnold is a slim, dark, snaky kind of guy you expect to abduct with the funds on a dark, rainy night. Hank is big and shaggy. He played football for Yale until one year he was tossed off the team for dirty playing. He looks dumb, but he isn't because he got through school with good enough marks. He is always having accidents while drunk, picking fights with taxi drivers, and making girls walk home.

In two minutes we skid to a stop in the gravel drive in front of the Jenkins' shack. Behind us I see 27 and 32 coming up fast. The D. A. is up the steps before we stop, and I and Solly are on his heels. There's a butler waiting, a tall solemn geezer with a dead-fish pan.

"What is it?" the D. A. yells. "Who's killed?"

"Mr. Jenkins, sir," the butler says, cool as an Eskimo igloo, "has been murdered."

He leads us inside into a library, where Arnold Jenkins is waiting.

"I caught the police broadcast at breakfast, Mr. Jenkins," the D. A. snaps. "And hopped a prowl car. Your father's been killed?"

"Murdered!" Arnold Jenkins answers crisply. "Norfolk discovered his body at nine o'clock when taking him breakfast. He called me, and I notified Police Headquarters at once. It's obviously murder."

"Right," says the D. A. "Who else is in the house?"

"My brother Henry, Norfolk, and the cook, Martha."

"They know anything?"

"They say not."

The boys from 27 and 32 come busting in, and the D. A. waves 'em back.

"Watch the doors, boys," he says. "Front and back. Where is the body, Mr. Jenkins?"

"This way." Arnold Jenkins leads us out of the library and down a hall. "It's a first floor bedroom. Nothing has been touched."

On the way I look at Solly. His round blue eyes are bulging out with excitement.

We come to a stop. Arnold Jenkins opens a door. We look in.

Old Andrew Jenkins was inside, stretched out on a bed, staring upwards with open eyes. His throat had been cut.

AFTER a couple of seconds we stepped in and looked around.

"Hmm," the D. A. said. "No struggle. Weapon not visible. Probably attacked in his sleep and failed to awaken."

He and I began our investigation by examining the room, and around the bed particular. Beside the bed was a small table, an alarm clock set for twelve, on which the alarm was slightly run down, and an empty saucer.

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Also a black pill box with a dozen capsules in it.

The D. A. put all this down in a notebook.

"Also," he said, "deceased is an elderly man. We'll have trouble deciding how long he has been dead. *Rigor mortis* is tricky in such cases. However, he's been dead a fairly long time. Sergeant, call the medical examiner for me. Also report to headquarters, and tell them I'm supervising this case."

It wasn't in his department, but he had the pull to do it if he wanted. I saluted.

"Norfolk," Arnold Jenkins put in, "will show you the telephone."

I followed the flunky down the hall. Already I was beginning to put two and three together. For a man whose father had just been murdered, Arnold Jenkins was a cool customer. And the butler. There was something about his face I didn't like. He was cool too—a human icicle. I had a hunch somebody knew a lot about this business we weren't being told.

I put through the call and then went back to the bedroom. Solly was there alone, standing at one of the four big French windows that led out on a long porch.

"Gee, Ed," he whispered to me, "this is sure a big case."

"You bet it is, Solly," I told him. "You just watch me, though, and you'll see how a big case is handled. It's a deep one. I'll tell you that. Tough."

"I bet it is," he said. "You think you and the D. A. can break it, sarge?"

"The D. A. is a smart guy," I told Solly, "and if I miss anything he'll catch it. You'll see how it's done."

The D. A. and Arnold Jenkins were out on the porch. The D. A. was pointing up at one of the tall white posts that held up a second story porch that rang along above this one. It was snowy white, but a black mark had dirtied it halfway up.

"That mark was not there yesterday, I'm positive," Arnold Jenkins said.

"It looks," the D. A. muttered, "to me as though a man's foot had rubbed against that post."

"That's a strange way for a porch pillar to get dirty," the dead man's son answered.

"Maybe so, maybe not," the D. A. told him. "Where is your brother Henry?"

"I think he's coming now," Arnold Jenkins said. "Yes, here he is."

Henry Jenkins, wearing a bathrobe, appeared in the French windows behind me. On his face there was a look of blank horror.

"Good God, Arnold," he said thickly, "I thought you were joking!"

"Joking isn't in my line, Henry," his brother answered him coldly. "Pull yourself together. This is the district attorney."

The young man was suffering from an awful hangover. I could tell. I've seen enough of them. We could all see he must have made a big night of it.

"I'll—I'll be all right in a minute," he said. "As soon as I get something to eat. I'm—badly shaken up by this."

He dropped into a porch chair.

"I'm sorry," he said to the D. A. "I didn't—didn't anticipate what was going to happen. So I got tight last night."

The butler hurried away to bring him some black coffee.

"Oooh," Henry Jenkins groaned. "I can hardly—hardly realize this thing, my head hurts so. I'm afraid I must have been completely blotto last night."

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While the butler was fixing the coffee, the D. A. went ahead with questioning both the men. The points he learned, as I explained carefully to Solly, were these:

Old man Jenkins had gone to bed at ten thirty.

Arnold and Henry were together in the downstairs living room until ten fifty, when Henry made a telephone call to some friends, suggesting they go partying. At eleven he went upstairs to dress.

Henry came downstairs at eleven twenty, dressed, his friends called for him at eleven thirty, and he left. He was with them until three. At three they brought him home, out on his feet. The butler helped Henry upstairs and put him to bed. And he was ready to swear Henry was unable to move a finger for himself. We could have guessed that much from the way he looked next morning.

Arnold went to bed at eleven forty-five, after Henry had left.

Norfolk went to bed at twelve, after locking up and turning out the lights. After putting Henry to bed when he rolled home at three, Norfolk went back to bed again.

The cook hadn't heard anything during the night either, according to Norfolk. She was his wife, and he should know.

II

THE D. A. frowned at the three of them — Henry, Arnold, and Norfolk.

"All right," he said. "We've got to have a motive. You don't know *who* killed Andrew Jenkins. Maybe you can guess *why* he was killed?"

Henry shook his head. Arnold shook his head. Norfolk shook his head.

"Damn it!" the D. A. exploded. "Haven't you *any* ideas? For instance, has your father gotten the best of anybody in a business deal lately? That might be an angle."

Arnold Jenkins smiled frostily.

"If we investigated everybody father cheated on a business deal," he said, "it would take until doomsday."

"Well, how about a quarrel?" the D. A. wanted to know. "I've heard he had a nasty temper—with all due respect for the dead. Who'd he quarrel with last?"

"I don't know of any quarrels that might have any significance," Arnold Jenkins said quickly.

I saw Norfolk hesitate. He opened his mouth and shut it again. And I saw him shoot a crafty look at the two brothers.

"Go on, guy, spill it!" I ordered him.

"Perhaps," he said, "we should tell Mr. Hopkins about last night's argument."

A distinct trace of annoyance flashed over Arnold Jenkins' face. But Henry Jenkins finished off a cup of black coffee with a gulp and set it down.

"By George!" he exclaimed. "That's right. Perhaps we should, Norfolk."

"I'm sure the matter is completely extraneous to this investigation," Arnold Jenkins said testily.

The D. A.'s face lit up and he opened his notebook again.

"I think not," he said grimly. "In fact I consider it very pertinent to this investigation. The details, please, Mr. Jenkins!"

With the D. A. prodding him with questions, young Arnold Jenkins finally came across with the whole story. I took Solly to one side and explained to him in easy words what it was all about. It went like this.

Last night there had been practically

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a free-for-all fight between Hank, Arnold and old man Jenkins. All of them have nasty tempers and dispositions. The language got pretty bitter and vindicative.

Old Jenkins started by bawling Henry out over his drunkenness and extravagance. Then he turned on Arnold and pitched into him for some business reasons—because he had fired some men at one of the factories.

Henry had gotten back by saying there was no use him working: he had such a good business man—his brother—in the family that there wasn't really room for two. That made Arnold say that he approved entirely of Hank's drinking and reckless driving, inasmuch as it was sure to kill him quickly, which would be a blessing to the whole family and the world.

Henry came back with the crack that a business man who used underhanded tactics was worse than a drunkard, who harmed himself only. The old man got mad at Henry for saying that, taking it as a reflection on himself. Henry told his father that if the shoe fitted he could wear it.

The old man turned on Arnold and told him he would brook no deviations from orders. Production was to be increased, starting immediately. Arnold told him he was crazy. That the Jenkins factories would be bankrupt in six months if they did.

Old Andrew Jenkins almost frothed at the mouth. He said that his son could get out of the business entirely. If he didn't, he'd throw him out. Arnold came back by saying if he did he wouldn't have any business inside of a year.

"Well," the D. A. said, "it sounds like a very pretty fight. And where does Norfolk enter into it?"

"He came in," Arnold Jenkins said, "as a referee, in a manner of speaking. Father said we'd have *his* opinion about the whole affair—whether to expand or reduce production."

So the D. A. turned to the impassive flunky.

"What'd you tell him, Norfolk?" he asked.

"I advised him against expansion, sir," the butler answered.

"Well!" the D. A. exclaimed. "So you advised a millionaire business man his ideas were wrong, eh? You knew all about it, eh?"

"Yes, sir. I explained that in my opinion America already had too great a producing capacity. I further stated that I considered it likely all production would soon be taken over by the government, anyway."

"You did, huh? And what happened then?"

"It was like exploding dynamite, sir," Norfolk said calmly. "Mr. Jenkins quite lost his head. He accused me of being a communist, a radical, a bolshevist, and he told me I was discharged."

"And what was the final outcome of it all?" the D. A. demanded of Arnold.

"Rather painful," the young man admitted reluctantly. "Father went to bed in a towering rage. He swore he would remove me from his business and cut me out of his will with five thousand dollars. He swore he'd cut Hank also out with five thousand, and we were both to get out of the house inside twenty-four hours. Norfolk, whom he had down in his will for fifty thousand dollars in consideration of long service, was not only discharged but was to lose the fifty thousand bequest."

"And you really think," the D. A. asked, looking him in the eye, "that

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quarrel is not pertinent to this murder investigation?"

"Certainly not," Arnold Jenkins said, but not very certainly. "We didn't take father seriously, of course."

"No?" the D. A. said sarcastically. "I think we can begin looking for the murderer right here in this house."

THE Jenkins boys seemed to want to argue, but the D. A. shut 'em up and sent 'em into the dining room to get breakfast.

"See, Solly," I said, "how deep this thing is? Hank now might have killed his father to save maybe five hundred thousand dollars he was due to get in the will. Arnold might have done the same thing. He had five hundred thousand at stake. And Norfolk, the butler, had fifty thousand at stake, coming to him after thirty, forty years' hard work. It would look like a lot for him to lose."

"Gosh," Solly whispered, "things sure get complicated, don't they? How you ever figure you'll find out the facts in this case, sarge?"

"Just wait and watch, Solly," I told him. "You'll see."

"Come on, boys," the D. A. said, when he'd gotten rid of the two young men. "We'll take a prowl around upstairs."

Upstairs we found a hall ran the length of the house, and several rooms opened off it. On the north side of the house there were three bedrooms. One wasn't in use. The boys had the other two. Each had a private bath. Each also opened onto the long porch that ran above the one outside the dead man's windows.

We went out on the porch and leaned over the rail. The D. A. pointed down.

"I'm damned," he said, "if I don't think that if a man were to let himself down by a rope from here his foot would likely hit that post. And that would explain the dirt mark."

We looked closer. The fresh paint on the rail was a bit marred. And in Henry's bedroom we found a rope. It was really a lariat, and was hung on the wall for a decoration. But when we took it down and uncoiled it we found tiny specks of white paint caught in the fibers near one end.

"So!" the D. A. said grimly. "Let's look a little further."

There were a bunch of shoes in the closet. We looked 'em over closely. One had a very faint splotch of white along the sole of the toe. And on the side of the shoe was a round, dark mark.

"Paint on the sole," the D. A. muttered. "And a drop of blood."

Along with the lariat, an Indian hunting knife that could have cut a man's throat as easily as a loaf of bread was hanging in a sheath. We got it down. There was no blood on it.

"But no dust either," the D. A. remarked. "And it looks too damned clean. See here."

On the rough horn handle were two tiny threads. They might have been threads from a bath towel used to wipe it after somebody had washed it—washed blood off it, say.

We looked, but didn't find anything more in that room. The next room was Arnold Jenkins'. We combed that, too. Nothing doing in there.

The D. A. turned to me.

"Well, Sergeant," he said. "Pretty conclusive evidence, don't you think?"

"Pretty damned conclusive," I told him. "It would take a pretty dumb guy to leave all that evidence, no matter how much hurry he was in."

"Something of the sort occurred to

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me," he mentioned. "Let's go down to the library. I want to think this out."

III

IN the library the D. A. dropped into an easy chair and began to study his notebook. I took another chair and was just getting ready to do some figuring myself when Solly came over, his eyes almost popping.

"Sarge!" he whispered hoarsely. "I got it! I got it!"

"The itch, Solly?" I asked him humorously.

"No. Who done this!" he told me. "I been thinking."

"Dangerous work for a cop, Solly," I tells him serious. "Better stick to shooting it out with mobsters. It's safer."

"No, listen, an' I'll explain it to you," he says eagerly. "It hit me all of a sudden, right between the eyes, I know who killed him!"

"No, Solly!" I exclaims. "Do tell me, quick!"

"It's like this," he whispers. "I just been considering over what we found up in that Hank's room. Now that paint on th' rope—he might of tied that rope to th' rail there where th' paint was dirtied!"

"So he might," I agreed. "Then what?"

"Well, look," Solly goes on. "He went upstairs at eleven, an' he comes down at eleven twenty. If he dressed fast an' didn't shave or wash much, he could dress in maybe six minutes. That would leave him fourteen."

"Absolutely correct," I admitted.

"So," Solly hurried on breathless, "he's a strong guy. Suppose, knowin' th' old man was asleep, an' bein' desperate to save that five hundred thousan' he was bein' cut out of th' will, he ties that rope to the rail and shinnies down it in a hurry. He has that huntin' knife in his teeth. He goes in those big windows, and he slashes th' old man's throat with th' knife. Then he wipes th' knife, maybe with a handkerchief or somethin', and shinnies back up th' rope. But unknowin', he hits that post with his foot—that's where he gets a white mark on his shoe—and he gets one drop of blood on his shoe too. He doesn't notice that. Back up, he coils up th' rope an' hangs it up again, washes th' knife good and dries it on a towel. Then he puts it back. Then, thinkin' he hasn't left any clews, he goes out on a party. In order to prove he's innocent, he gets tight as a drum, so that when he gets back he's helpless, and so couldn't have did it.

"Ain't that a lulu of a scheme, sarge?"

"It's a beaut, Solly," I concedes. "Th' guy that thought that up is bright."

"Shall I go arrest him?" he wants to know, all eagerness.

"Not yet, Solly," I tells him, mysterious. "We got to wait."

"Wait for what?"

"You'll see, Solly," I tells him, grinning to think how surprised he's gonna be when we arrest the murderer of Andrew Jenkins. "There's more to come."

"Gee," he says, "I guess there's a lot to learn about this detectin' business I never guessed. Well, anyway, I'm gonna keep a eye on him so he doesn't take it on the lam."

He goes on out to watch Hank Jenkins eat breakfast just as the D. A. called me over.

"Sergeant," he says, "I think we're agreed about that evidence we found."

"I think so," I told him.

"Evidence like that," he went on, "is easy to plant. Awfully easy. It

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wouldn't surprise me to find even more pointing in that same direction."

"Nor me," I agreed.

"The trouble with framing a man, though," the D. A. said, "is that the evidence has to be obvious, and it takes a pretty stupid man to leave obvious evidence. On the other hand, there's no evidence against anybody else. So far as the evidence goes, Hank Jenkins killed his father in that interval when he was supposed to be dressing—which would be possible. Now if we could only establish the time of death accurately we'd know whether he did or not. After eleven thirty it would be impossible for him to have done it. But after twelve it would be possible for anybody *but* Hank to kill old Jenkins—with particular reference to Arnold, or even Norfolk."

"It sure would," I agreed. "And I got my ideas who it was."

"So have I," he said. "But we can't get around the evidence that points to Hank Jenkins. And if any more of it turns up—"

Norfolk, the butler, came in.

"Beg pardon, sir," he says. "But Martha, my wife, has just discovered that someone burned something in the bake stove last night. It would appear to have been a handkerchief with blood on it, sir."

The D. A. gave me a look.

"And I have it noted down in my book that Hank Jenkins was observed to go out to the kitchen for ice and for a drink at eleven thirty last night, just before leaving!" he said despairingly.

WE looked at the stove. It was a little coal burning stove that Martha, the cook, a big red-faced woman, used only for baking. Norfolk lifted the round iron lid and we looked in. On the cold coals was a thin sheet of ash. On the edge of the iron fire box a tiny corner of white cloth hadn't been burned. On it was a tiny spot that might have been blood.

"Someone," the D. A. said, "came out here last night and dropped a handkerchief on the live coals."

Solly Evans peered interestedly into the stove.

"My old lady has one like this, only not so new," he said. "She likes to bake with a coal fire."

"I wouldn't bake with any other," Martha the cook said excitedly.

"That's what my wife says," Solly agreed.

We went back into the library, me and the D. A. very thoughtful. Even Solly was subdued. Until suddenly he burst out:

"Well, sarge, does that prove my theory or doesn't it? Didn't I say he wiped the knife with a handkerchief? Then he had to burn th' handkerchief!"

"Yes, Solly, it proves something or other," I answered, a little sore.

"And that ain't all," Solly went on. "That stove now. I can tell you something about those stoves. They—"

"Solly, will you kindly shut up and let me think!" I barked, exasperated. "You're too dumb to realize it, but there is some tough thinking to be done on this case yet."

"Okay, if you say so," he mumbles, and clams up.

I have the whole thing figured out to my satisfaction soon—who done it, what the evidence meant, and all; but there is still one thing all to the bad. It is impossible to prove the evidence we found is phony, which any guy who is not totally deficient in mentality can see it is. Nobody could be so dumb as to leave all *that* evidence. And still there ain't a clew pointing towards the guy I am sure did leave it.

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"It's a question of time, Sergeant," the D. A. says. "Yes, damn it, the time. If we could only find some way to establish definitely the time of death—"

But we couldn't, even when the M. E. came a few minutes later. He looked at the body, then shook his head.

"I'd hate to guess," he said, "I really would. Old people who die violent deaths show deceptive indications. Rigor may or may not set in quickly. Anywhere from six to ten hours is the best I can do."

"I was afraid of that," the D. A. sighed gloomily.

"I see the old fellow suffered from a bad digestion," the M. E. said casually, picking up the black pill box on the bedside table. "I suppose he had to take one of these things just before he was killed," he added, looking at the half empty glass of water.

"What's that?" the D. A. exclaimed.

"I say it seems he took one during the night before he was murdered. Sometimes the poor devils who suffer from this type of indigestion have to be awakened at night to take their capsules. It's rather inconvenient."

"Sergeant," the D. A. said tensely, "get that butler here quick!"

I popped out. I found Norfolk and Solly Evans in the kitchen, having some kind of a gab feast. I heard 'em say something about "going out early" before I broke up the huddle.

"Untangle, boys," I said. "Neither of you is going out or any place else, early."

"Sarge," Solly beams, "this guy and me has been comparing notes, and, say, I wasn't mistaken. Lemme tell you I can prove who killed—"

"Stow it, Solly, bury it," I said peevishly. "This is no time for foolishness. Come along, butler, the D. A. wants you."

I took him into the dead man's bedroom, Solly following along, looking disappointed, but of course I didn't have time to kid him along now.

"Norfolk," the D. A. said, fixing the flunky with his eyes, "tell us about Mr. Jenkins' treatment for his indigestion."

Norfolk looked startled.

"His treatment, sir?"

"How often did he take these pills?" the D. A. demanded, pointing to the box.

The butler looked flustered.

"Well, sir," he said, "Mr. Jenkins ate only breakfast and dinner, and he was required to take one capsule an hour after each meal, then two more at two-hour intervals after the first. That meant that, eating breakfast at nine, he took a pill at ten, then twelve, then two. Eating dinner at seven, he took a capsule at eight, at ten and at twelve."

"At twelve?" the D. A. said, his eyes half shut.

"Yes, sir," Norfolk said. "As he retired early it was necessary for him to wake to take it. He kept this small alarm clock beside his bed. Each evening when I turned the bed clothes down I wound the clock and put the glass of water on the table. In the saucer I would put a pill. He would wake at twelve when the alarm clock rang, turn off the alarm, take the capsule with a swallow of water, and fall asleep again."

"Thanks, you can go now," the D. A. said. The butler beat it with relief.

The D. A. picked up the clock.

"The alarm is set for twelve, and the alarm wind has slightly run down," he said. "The pill in the saucer is gone.

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Some of the water has been swallowed. The inference is unmistakable."

"That he was alive at twelve," the M. E. said. "Yes, of course. He woke and took the capsule. That proves he died *after* twelve—maybe any time up to three thirty."

"He was alive at twelve," the D. A. said exultantly, "and that means we know who killed him!"

IV

HE was right. Solly looked blank, but of course I got it. We knew Hank Jenkins was out of the picture from eleven thirty onward, which made the evidence against him phony. Which meant—well, I knew what it meant!

The D. A. turned toward us with a grim smile.

"Do you get it, boys?" he asked.

I nodded. Solly nodded. Even Solly could see it by now, it was so plain that somebody, seeing Hank come in at three dead to the world had taken the opportunity to kill old Jenkins and frame Hank for it.

"Then go get him and bring him here, boys!" the D. A. snapped.

We went toward the dining room, without seeing anybody. Hank and Arnold had finished their breakfast and disappeared.

"Scout around, Solly," I said, "and have your gun ready. I'll look in the kitchen."

Solly headed toward the library and I took the kitchen. Out there in a little pantry I found Norfolk the butler. I closed in on him. He was just pouring himself a drink from a bottle.

"Is that whisky?" I asked him.

He nodded and even ventured a sort of weak smile.

"Detective work must be very exciting, Mr. Sergeant," he said. "I've always wanted to meet real detectives."

"Bo, you're gonna have plenty of chance," I hinted.

He held the glass towards me with a shaking hand.

"What—what do you mean?" he faltered.

"Before they electrocute you," I growled at him.

He gave a sort of gurgle and his hand went up in alarm. The whisky hit me square in the top button of my uniform. I smelled like a speakeasy.

I was mad. I grabbed a hold of him.

"Come along!" I snarled. "This is the pay-off."

He started to babble something, but I shut him up and dragged him along to the bedroom. Because I had figured from the very first who was guilty. Who knew Hank was so tight he couldn't wake up? Who knew the opportunity was made to order for framing him? Who saw his chance to kill the old man and have his legacy, and get somebody else pinned with it? Who but Norfolk?

With one hand around his skinny windpipe, I shoved Norfolk ahead of me into the dead man's bedroom. The D. A. was there, and the M. E., and Arnold Jenkins, and two of the boys from 27. Solly wasn't in sight. Neither had Hank Jenkins appeared yet.

"Sergeant," he yelled when I came in with my prisoner, "what the hell are you doing, choking that man?"

"I'm not choking him, sir," I beamed, letting up on Norfolk's windpipe so he could breathe a little. "I'm just making sure he won't get away. Here he is, sir—th' guy who killed Mr. Jenkins."

The D. A. turned a little purple.

"Are you crazy, Sergeant?" he bellowed. "Let that man go! And arrest this man immediately for murder!"

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He pointed to Arnold Jenkins.

He was pointing when Solly Evans came lumbering into the room. Over Solly's shoulder, like a bag of potatoes, Hank Jenkins was slung, as cold as an iced fish.

"Here he is, sir," Solly said. "He gave me an argument, but I brought him. Here's th' guy who done the murder, sir!"

FOR a minute the D. A. was silent. Then he broke loose. Before he finished I had let the butler loose and my face was getting red. Solly, looking badly puzzled, had put Hank Jenkins down. The M. E. brought him to with spirits of ammonia. But Solly didn't seem to be getting it. He just looked blank.

"Of all the imbeciles I have ever seen," the D. A. yelled, "you two take the cake!"

"But" Solly began, "th' evidence—"

"The evidence!" the D. A. gritted. "For you, Sergeant Gore, there is some excuse. The butler undoubtedly was a possible suspect, though anyone with common sense should have realized that only Arnold Jenkins could formulate such a diabolical plan for killing his father and getting rid of his brother, too, via a murder charge.

"But you, Officer Evans! It seems that you can't see when a frame-up is being pulled.

"If this case had been left in your hands Arnold Jenkins would have succeeded. Properly estimating the intelligence of at least some of the police, he, after awakening to see his brother brought home drunk and helpless at three in the morning, faked the clews of the rope, the spots on Henry's shoes, and the mark on the porch pillar so that the train of evidence against Henry was unmistakable. Do you comprehend, Evans?

"As a final touch, the murderer had to get rid of a bloody handkerchief used to wipe the murder weapon. And, recalling that his brother had been alone in the kitchen at eleven thirty, he even twisted this fact to his purpose by going out and dropping the handkerchief on the live coals in the bake stove, so that it would seem his brother had so disposed of it hours earlier.

"And now do you see the scheme by which Arnold Jenkins tried to railroad his brother to the electric chair, Officer Evans?"

"Nope," Solly said stubbornly, shaking his head. "That ain't right."

"What isn't right?" the D. A. howled.

"About that handkerchief," Solly insisted. "You was just sayin', Mr. Hopkins, that the old fellow was killed after Hank came home tight at three in th' morning. But if that handkerchief was put in th' stove after three A.M. in th' morning it wouldn't never of burned up.

"You see, Mr. Hopkins, like I kept tellin' th' sergeant here, I knowed all along this Hank was guilty, after I seen that evidence in his room. Yes, sir! And when we found th' handkerchief in th' stove, then I was certain.

"Because that coal stove is just like one my old lady—my wife—has, and they go out early if you don't put more coal in 'em. If that stove was used at dinner time it would of gone out long before three A.M. in th' morning. In fact it would be gone out about midnight. So if anybody burned a handkerchief in it they had to do it before midnight. That's how I knew this guy Hank put th' handkerchief in when he was out there at eleven thirty—"

He was interrupted. Hank Jenkins

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tried to get out of the room. And Solly hit him again—one clean swing on the button.

"So you see," Solly said, while Hank Jenkins lay on th' floor, cold as a fish again, "this is got to be th' guy that killed th' old man!"

HE was right, too! What had Hank Jenkins done but leave those other clews himself to make it look as if he was being framed!

He figured nobody could be dumb enough to believe *he* was dumb enough to leave so much plain evidence behind him. He was cagy; knew we would figure it just exactly as we did. Actually, he had killed the old man just the way Solly had doped it out. But he made it look as if he was being double-crossed. That would prove he was innocent. Then, if he could frame some evidence on Arnold he could have all the property.

That is why I am peeved at Solly Evans, the dumbbell. The D. A. smelled the whisky Norfolk had spilled on me.

"If you did less drinking on duty you might be able to appreciate the information your subordinates gather, Sergeant Gore!" he said coolly. "I'll see matters are properly adjusted, however."

So now I am Officer Gore of Car 33, and it is Sergeant Evans who sits beside me. And I am pretty peeved to think of it because Solly, the big lunk, was just too dumb to be fooled.

Two Thrilling Novelettes

The Kid Steals a Star

By ERLE STANLEY GARDNER

The Patent Leather Kid fights daring racketeers that are cleaning up a million a week! Their scheme is diabolically clever—but the Kid is clever, too.

Four with One Face

By HERMAN LANDON

The headless corpses of two beautiful girls were left to mystify the police. What horrible, what fiendish plot was succeeding? For only *one* face, *one* head, fitted both those bodies!

IN NEXT WEEK'S ISSUE OF DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY

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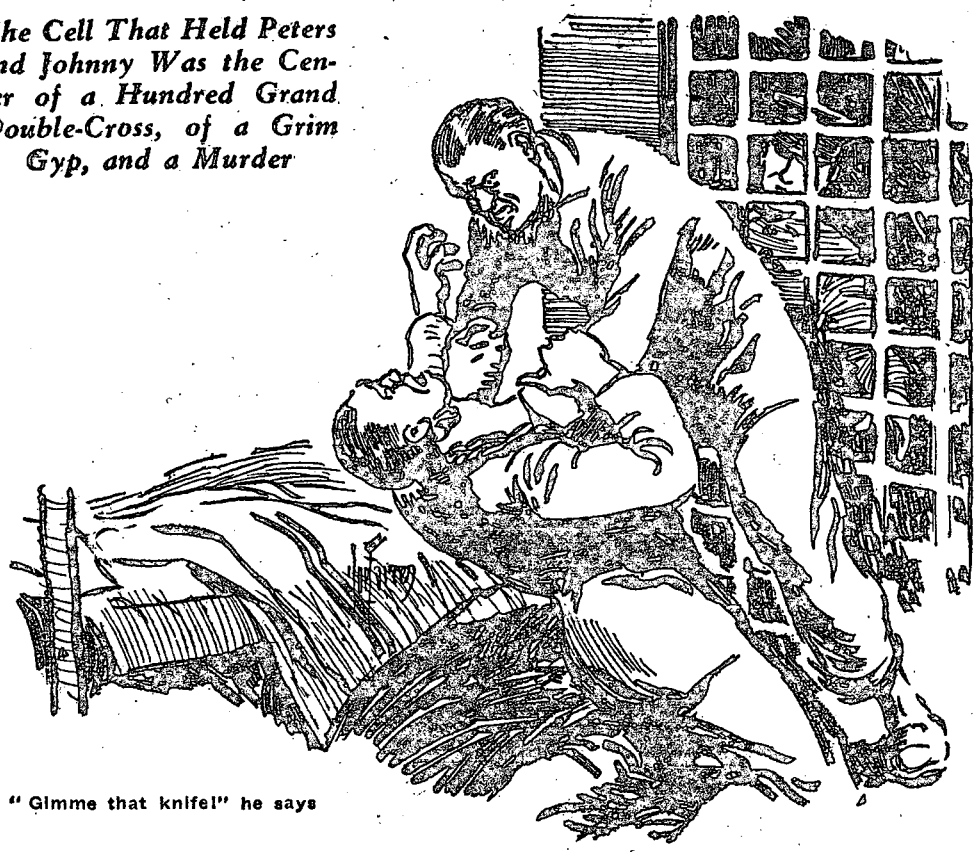
Peters

By Thomas Topham

The Cell That Held Peters and Johnny Was the Center of a Hundred Grand Double-Cross, of a Grim Gyp, and a Murder



"Gimme that knife!" he says

I COULDN'T make out this guy Peters, who was my cellmate. Big bird an' tough-lookin', and at first sight I figgered he'd mebbe done a couple stretches. When I first git my lamps on him we're all lined up fer the evenin' lock-up. Then when the gong rings fer us to pop in our cells, what does he do but beat me in, which gits my goat, so I give him a shove that sent him clean to the back wall.

"What'd you do that fer?" he wants to know, rubbin' his elbow where it had hit the wall.

"Lissen, big guy," I tell this mug, "I guess you're a fish or you wouldn't a-done it, but I come in first, see, when the *ding-dong* clangs. Get yer paws up here fer the count. The screw's comin' down the line an' we don't want this cell chalked. See?"

If anything wasn't exactly reg'lar, the screw would put a chalk mark on the lock an' both the guys in there would come in fer regulation, whether they was both guilty or not. So I wasn't aimin' fer him to git me in no jam.

Peters gits his fists up fer the count

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an' squints at the screw at he comes along testin' the locks an' making his count. Then we takes our hands down off'n the bars an' we're free to read or talk or work puzzles or what-have-you fer a couple hours or so before the lights go out. So I look around to size up this new cellmate who'd been wished on me, an' he's cryin'. Great big guy with a tough-lookin' mug, an' he's blubberin' like a kid.

"Hey, bo," I sing out, very much surprised. "What the hell?"

"I can't stand it," he says, all choked up. "Locked in this little hole. My God, it's awful." An' with that he grabs fer the door an' tries to shake it an' commences hollerin'.

Well, that's not 'specially unusual fer a fish to do. I remembered back when I was a fish six years before, how the slammin' of that door on me made me jumpy fer a couple weeks. But I didn't do no blubberin' or hollerin'. I gritted my teeth an' got by someway. Of course a screw comes paddin' down the corridor an' squints in at Peters. The screw was Nick Soper, who ain't a bad guy as screws go. "Johnny," he says to me, "grab this guy an' bat his ears down or I'll have to come in an' do it. What's bitin' him?"

"He's a fish," I tell Nick. "What'd you wish him on me fer? Me an' Charley was gittin' along fine." But I give Peters a kick in the pants that makes him turn 'round, an' then I pry his hands off the door.

"Lissen, guy," I growl at Peters, "that kinda stuff don't git you nowhere. Drop down yer bunk an' I'll sing you to sleep or somethin', but settle down."

"I'll be good," says Peters, an' I plant him on a stool. Nick is still lookin' in at us. "You got him, Johnny," says Nick. "Take care of the cry-baby tonight an' I'll have the captain talk to him tomorrer. You tell him about the hole an' how nice it is down there."

With that Nick goes off to his own pitcher puzzle, leavin' me with Peters on my hands. Peters rubs his eyes with his sleeve like a kid.

"I'm all right now," he says. "It's the first bang of the door does it. I been thinkin' an' thinkin' about that fer weeks, an' when it finally come it seemed like I was gonna go crazy. It wasn't like this in the county jail. The jailers an' everybody here in the penitentiary ain't friendly like in jail. An' when the door slammed it felt jest like they was lockin' me up in a tomb an' I was smotherin'."

"Fergit it," I tell him. "You'll soon git used to that, an' this cell will seem like home. I been hearin' that clangin' fer six years an' I got about six more to lissen to it. What's yer jolt?"

I knew if I could get him talkin' about his "case" he'd probably settle down. Funny thing about fish, they all want to talk about their cases to anybody who'll lissen, an' tell you how innocent they are. But Peters surprises me. When I ask him what's his jolt, he looks down at the floor an' mumbles. I ask him ag'in.

"One to fourteen," he says, lookin' up, "with the judge recommendin' I serve it all."

OF course I knowed he was a long-termer, or he wouldn't a-been in my section, but fourteen years, even with time off, is pretty long. But I was real cheerful about it. No use to make this guy think he was the worst off in stir.

"Fourteen," I say. "Well, that's plenty long, but not as bad as doin' the book, an' lots of guys are doin' that

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without yowlin'. What kind of a rap did they stick on you?"

"Rap?" he says, lookin' puzzled. Then he savvies. "Oh, yes, I heard what that means in the county jail. It means charge. Oh, I tried to split a man's head with a meat cleaver."

I look at Peters more respectful an' decide I won't kick him in the pants no more.

"Assault with intent to commit murder," he says. "I'm sorry the man didn't die. He ducked jest in the nick of time an' he got well."

"What'd this guy you sliced up do to you?" I ask him. "Musta been somethin' pretty bad."

"He beat me out of a hundred thousand dollars," says Peters. An' with that he shut up. I prodded him, tryin' to git him to talk, but he jest says yes an' no, so I give up an' go to work on the pitcher puzzle Nick Soper, the screw, had lent me.

Them jig-saw puzzles was certainly the McCoy fer us guys. They made 'em in one of the shops, an' you had to have your privilege card to get 'em. Funny, but a lotta tough guys who hadn't carried their privilege cards fer months quit bein' tough so they could git a puzzle. An' every time you'd go in an office you'd see a captain or a screw busy with one of them puzzles an' cussin' the boys who'd sawed 'em because they'd commenced puttin' a lotta fancy stuff in 'em.

When the bell rings fifteen minutes before lights go out, I show Peters how to make up his bunk an' how to push the stuffin' so it fits in the small of the back, but he don't pay much attention, jest climbs up an' flops in. Couple of times in the night I hear him blubberin' up there in his bunk, but I don't say nothin'.

Well, this Peters is a queer bird. He don't say nothin' any more unless I prod him; won't talk no more about his case, don't talk none about the prison. Natcherally I'd ruther have a good chummy guy to cell with than a rumdum like him, so I ask the screw, Nick Soper, what can be done about it. I tell Nick I been a boarder so long I oughta have some rights, an' Nick scratches his ear an' agrees.

"Trouble is, Johnny," says Nick, "the P. K."—that's the Principal Keeper—"he put this guy in with you hisself fer some reason. The P. K. said somethin' about him bein' a bad actor an' thought you could tame him, havin' been in a long time an' knowin' the ropes. So I can't do much."

"I didn't say no more about changin' cellmates, because I knew it wouldn't be no use if the P. K. had poked in his oar, but I wondered a lot about what Nick had said. An' I work on Peters some more, tryin' to git him talkin' to see if I can find out what's in the wind. Nothin' doin' in that line, though.

About two weeks go by an' one night Nick hands me in a ticket. It's fer me to see the P. K. next day at ten o'clock. In some joints the P. K. is captain of the guard, but it wasn't like that with us. The Principal Keeper had charge of the cell houses an' nothin' else. He was, you might say, chief turnkey, only not called that.

Our P. K. was Captain Walters an' I'd always got along with him all right, but never chummy because I wasn't no stoolie. I jest went along tendin' to my own business, an' won a rep fer keepin' outa trouble an' havin' some influence with the boys.

It's a lot different inside a prison than most folks think. It ain't all fightin' an' trouble. If you don't stir up no trouble, nine times out of ten the

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screws is so glad that even the hard-boiled ones will go outa their way to let you alone, an' after a while even look the other way if you wanta take a couple drags at a smoke when you're at work, or slip from your mess-line to another if you wanta chin with a guy.

When I go to work in the storehouse next mornin' I flash my ticket on the storekeeper an' he puts his initials on it to show anybody who might stop me that it was jake, an' at ten I show up in the line to the P. K.'s office. At that time of the mornin' twice a week the P. K. lissens to complaints an' applications fer cell transfers, or anything the boys want to bring up in his line, which goes a long way toward makin' our stir a pleasant place to live in if you have to.

They's a couple guys ahead of me, but finally I git in an' the P. K. is real pleasant. He asks me how things is over in C an' if I'm treated all right, an' how I like the new mattresses they're puttin' in, an' finally he brings up this guy Peters. I think then that Nick had mentioned to him I wanted a new cellmate, but that ain't it.

"Johnny," says the P. K., "has this bird been doin' any talkin' since you been cellin' with him?"

"What kinda talkin'?" I ask, suspicious that the P. K. is tryin' to work me in fer a little stoolin'.

The P. K. sees I'm suspicious an' might dummy up, so he laughs. "Not what you're thinkin'," he says, quick. "I don't want anything on him, an' I wouldn't come to you if I did, because I know you ain't no pigeon. But somethin' is eatin' on that guy Peters, an' I want to find out what it is. It's about his crime. He tried to brain a bird with a ax or somethin', an' I'd like to git the low-down on it. Some stories come up with him from the county jail. It's in his own interest I want this dope. If you could git him to open up—well, Johnny, this new parole board ain't so hard-boiled as you think they are, if a good word is slipped to 'em."

I think this over a minute or two. So long as the P. K. ain't after gittin' somethin' on Peters, why not give it a whirl? Anyway, I could promise. Six years is six years, an' if I could slip about four off that without shakin' 'em off my back, I'm that much to the good. "I'll see what I can find out," I promise the P. K., "but he's a hard nut to crack."

II

I GO away thinkin' hard. I'd always figgered the P. K. was on the level, but you never can tell. I'll hand it to penitentiary officials, the big majority is too damn' honest, probably because they see what it's like to serve time. But some prison officials make their pile outa their jobs an' retire. There's plenty of temptation. Once in a while a crook tells 'em where their dough is hid out an' they get it an' keep it. Mebbe they help the guy out, mebbe not. An' Peters, on that first night when his nerves was shook all to hell, had said the guy he lammed had beat him out of a hunnerd grand. Mebbe the P. K. had heard that story. It all looked kinda funny.

I figgered then I could try to git Peters talkin', an' if I didn't think it was the thing to do I didn't have to tell the P. K. So that night I begin workin' on Peters. I give him a chocolate bar. The big stiff et it, but kept his mouth shut. The next night I give him a couple tailor-made cigarettes.

Say, is Peters grateful? He sucked them cigarettes till they burned his fingers. "I thought you was jest a hard-boiled bum," says Peters to me,

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"but I see there's still some humanity left in folks who git in prison. I been famishin' fer a tailor-made."

Fer the first time that night Peters does a little confidential talkin', an' among other things he says is that if he ever got out an' the guy who beat him out of his dough was alive, he wouldn't stay alive long. I see the cigarettes had started him, so I tell Nick to tell the P. K. to slip me a couple packs of cigarettes.

"Yeah," says Nick, "an' a lobster salad an' a bottle of bubble water."

"Nick," I says, "I wouldn't fool you or git you in no jam, but if you won't do it, you better gimme a ticket to see him myself."

"I'll do it," says Nick, "but this is gittin' to be a hell of a stir when a con can order hisself what he wants."

Nick looked at me funny when he handed me the cigarettes that night. "Watch yer step, kid," he says. I wasn't a kid, but he always called me that.

It's funny how a little thing like ready-made cigarettes broke down Peters. Seems like he'd smoked a couple packages a day on the outside, an' takin' 'em away hit him hard. He couldn't git used to rollin' his own out of the tobacco the prison furnished. Settin' there in the cell with a cigarette jammed in his face he began to talk.

"How do you git these cigarettes?" he asks me.

I spin him a yarn about how I'd been in a long time an' knowed the ropes, an' he swallered it. "You know the ropes," he said. "I never thought of that, but you might help me."

"How?" I ask him.

"To escape," he says.

"Lissen, buddy," I tell him, "if I could help another guy escape I could help myself."

"That's so," he says, "but I certainly do want to git out of this place."

"The bulletin board says there was thirty-six hunnerd an' fifty-six guys in this place last Saturday," I says, "an' thirty-six hunnerd an' fifty-six of them guys would like to git out of this place."

He sets thinkin'. I give him another cigarette. Then out comes his story. "I ain't no common criminal," he opens up. "I swatted that guy because I had to. He took jest the same as a hundred thousand cold cash away from me."

Then he rambles on an' I piece it all together. Seems that Peters had invented somethin' about electricity. He didn't git a patent on it because he figgered the big electrical companies would steal it an' beat him in the courts. It was a doodad that he made an' that the electric people couldn't see the inside of. He demonstrated to them that it worked an' was a big thing, so they was gonna pay him a hunnerd grand fer the doodad jest as she stood.

An' a feller named Wallin, who'd married his sister, swiped the doodad, aimin' to undersell Peters an' take the dough hisself. Peters thought the electrical people put him up to it. So natcherally Peters tries to kill 'im. I didn't blame him none fer that. An' now Peters wanted to git out so he could complete the job on this guy Wallin. He was jest natcherally heartbroken because he hadn't made good on the job.

I thought over Peters' story an' I didn't see no reason why I shouldn't tell it to the P. K., so I slip the word to Nick I'd like to talk to the P. K. an' I quick git my ticket. The P. K. seems mighty interested in what I have to say.

I tell the P. K. about this invention an' how Peters' main thought now is

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to git the guy Wallin, his brother-in-law. "A dirty deal," says the P. K. "I heard somethin' about it an' I tried to talk to Peters, but he dummied up. That's the reason I shoved him over on to you. I figgered you could git him talkin' an' that would relieve his mind. It don't do fer guys in here to brood."

Well, that was true. Some of these prison screws who go in fer what they call psychology do a lot of good. "Well," I say, "I've got him limbered up an' his mind relieved, so how about a new cellmate fer me?"

"Not yet, Johnny," says the P. K., real friendly. "We got to do more yet fer this guy. Git him talkin' about his doodad. Find out whether he could make another one, an' if he can I'll put him over in the electrical shop. That'll take his mind off his troubles."

I LEAVE the P. K. thinkin' pretty hard. Him sayin' that about Peters makin' another doodad sounded funny. But I string Peters along an' git him talkin' an' ask him. He says, sure he could make another, but wouldn't be any use. This crook brother-in-law had collected on the other one, so why fool with the thing? He wasn't interested a-tall in makin' another one.

I report to the P. K. what Peters said about it an' he scratched his chin. "Keep him talkin'," he says to me. "Keep him in a good humor, Johnny. Here's two more packs of cigarettes to feed him. I'm gonna do plenty for you over you helpin' like this."

It wasn't long after this that a lawyer comes up to see Peters. Peters tells me about it when we're in our cell an' I've dished him out a couple smokes. "He's the feller who defended me," says Peters, "an' he says he's still workin' on my case. He thinks mebbe if I would make him another doodad like the first one he could raise some money on it. He says he might sell it to another company an' let them fight it out in the courts, an' anyway he might git enough so he might make a hot fight fer me fer a parole. He looked it up, an' the company that bought the thing ain't had it patented yet."

"That's funny," I say. "You gonna do it?"

"No, I ain't," he says. "I don't trust nobody no more. This lawyer'd sell it an' leave me here to whistle fer fourteen years. The lawyer took me over to the Principal Keeper an' he told me I could make one here in prison, but I said I didn't want to."

Then the whole thing struck me sudden. Somethin' had gone wrong with this doodad that Peters' brother-in-law had stole. It had failed to work, or they'd busted it, or didn't know how to run it, I figgered, an' they was tryin' to git this big bozo Peters to give 'em another, Peters' mouthpiece was probably in on the deal an' they had took the P. K. in with them. A gyp, an' a dirty one.

Of course, it wasn't no skin off my red nose what they done to Peters. He was jest a big, hard-lookin' mug, an' not a pleasant one either. So I kept my mouth shut about what I thought, because I was comin' in fer some benefit myself, if the P. K. kept his promise.

I still got some good friends outside an' I send out a kite to find out what I could about Peters. I git a letter over the walls without the warden's chief clerk gittin' his cheaters on it, an' Tommy Trimble, who I wrote to, gits me what dope he can.

This Peters, he says in his letter that he got smuggled back, had been framed. He had gone after his brother-in-law with a meat cleaver jest like he said, but his swing had only nicked him.

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Jest the same, they send Peters up fer his fourteen years an' his fambly look on an' grin. At the trial it was showed that Peters hadn't never liked this brother-in-law an' had made some threats before, so the judge was as hard on him as he could be.

About the time I git this dope through the underground, the P. K. has me up ag'in. "Johnny, you have quite an inflooence on Peters," he tells me. Then he says he's had a visit from a lawyer an' the lawyer wanted Peters to make another of his doodads an' thought he might git some money fer it. "I want to do what I can fer the boy," says the P. K., "so I told the lawyer I'd git permission from the warden to let Peters work on this invention, but now Peters refuses. Fer his own good, I wish you could git Peters to do it."

"Okay," I tell the P. K., bein' sure now about the P. K. bein' in with the lawyer an' Peters' brother-in-law. But I decide to string along with the P. K., which is to my interest. I'll git at least two years knocked off, I feel sure, an' what's Peters to me? So I work on Peters an' advise him to go into the electrical shop an' fix up this doodad.

Peters bucks fer a while, but I point out he ain't got a thing to lose, an' finally he agrees, so I write him an application to git an interview with the P. K. an' drop it in the box.

The P. K. gits quick action. The same day the application goes in Peters is transferred over to the electrical shop an' begins work on his doodad. One night he tells me it's about complete, an' is only waitin' fer some stuff he'd asked fer. "They sure are nice," he says. "I only have to ask fer somethin' an' they git it right off the bat."

Then a week later Peters tells me it's complete. Next night he tells me he's turned it over to the P. K., who had promised to write his lawyer to come up an' git it, an' everything is set, I see, to skin the boob out of his socks an' keep him in stir. Me, too. Yeah, I'm in as deep as anybody.

The P. K. gives me the tip-off that I can put in a new application for parole that'll git the warden's John Hancock. That'll knock pretty near six years off my jolt, an' git me on the street pretty quick, which is a lot better'n I had expected.

III

WHILE I'm feelin' good over this, Peters comes in one night all hopped to hell. "I'm gonna escape," he tells me. "I been makin' friends in this place, an' a feller in the electrical shop has taken me in on a plan to escape. So mebbe I won't have to go through a long fight fer a parole before I git a chanst to croak that crook brother-in-law of mine."

I'm kinda surprised by this. Cons don't go around offerin' each other plans fer a sneak unless they know 'em pretty well. "Lissen here," I say, "lemme hear about this escape thing. I don't wanta join you or horn in, but lemme go over it fer you. I've saw lots of good plans go flooey."

Peters ain't a bit backward about tellin' me the whole thing. I'm his big friend, he thinks. "This friend of mine," he says, "is gonna slip me a knife. We'll wait till the gong rings fer supper an' the guards has mostly been called over to the mess-hall. This guy knows all about how they swing the guards over there, so jest as that's done me, bein' big an' strong, I grab the guard jest inside the gate, stick the knife at his throat an' threaten to kill 'im unless he knocks on the door to the fish tank. They have a signal fer

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that, you know. Then me an' my friend go through the fish tank to the corridor, hold up the guard there, an' go out through the offices."

"Yes," I say. "Good scheme. "Who's your friend who fixed this all up?"

Peters kinda hesitates. "I promised I'd not breathe a word of this to anybody," he says, "but I'm tellin' you because, till I met this other man, you was my only friend here. I tried to get him to let you in on this, but he refused."

"That's all right," I tell him, "but who is this friend?"

"Jess Hopkins," he says. "He hasn't been in the electrical shop very long. Jest moved over from the laundry."

I didn't say nothin' more, jest looked at the poor boob. Jess Hopkins was the biggest stoolpigeon there was in stir. He'd stool on his grandmother to git another piece of pie. Twice guys had stuck chivs in Jess, an' once the warden had had to lock him in the hole to keep birds from croakin' him when he tipped off somethin'.

The whole thing was plain as day to me now. The P. K. was in with the lawyer on this an' the lawyer was in with Peters' brother-in-law. Havin' got Peters to make this second doodad, the scheme now was to git rid of him fer good. The P. K. would give the stoolie the chiv to slip to Peters, an' when Peters tried to use it the wall guard would put a bullet through him neat an' complete, an' probably would never know but what he'd stopped a real escape plot. An' if the guard didn't kill him, they could try Peters fer attackin' a guard with a knife. The law was you could hang him fer that, an' at least they could give him life.

But what surprised me was why the P. K. had left me cellin' with Peters. He might know Peters would tell me all about it. Of course, the P. K. might have figgered I'd stand fer it, havin' a lot at stake myself

"When do you git the knife?" I ask Peters.

"Tomorrow in the mess-line," he says. "Supper time. It'll be too late to do it then, but I kin pull it the next day."

I knew it wasn't any use to try to tell Peters the truth. I'd only git myself all messed up. An' besides, it sounded like a good scheme, jest good enough to make a guy who didn't know a lot about the joint think it was swell.

Sure 'nough, Peters had the knife the next night. "Where'll I put it tonight?" he asks me. "They might have a search."

"If they have a search they'll find it no matter where you put it," I tell him.

Peters finally puts the knife under his mattress, an' when he's asleep I slip it out. The damn thing would just slip through the door gratin', so I balanced it there an' give it a heave. It cleared the railin' on the platform an' went tumblin' down three tiers to the concrete floor below.

Of course, a screw picked it up right away, on account of the noise it made, an' then they was a hell of a row. The night screws in our cell-block didn't have no idee where it come from an' they pow-wowed an' called the P. K. an' the deputy an' the warden, an' they marched us all out tier by tier while they searched us an' the cells.

When they waked up Peters to roust him out he reaches fer his knife, scared to death. When he finds it's gone he

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goes plumb up in the air. "You got it," he hisses at me. "You're the one that stole it."

But about then we're turned out an' Peters is sure surprised when the screws don't find no knife. When we git back in our cell, Peters grabs me by the throat. "Now, you thief," he says, "gimme that knife. You got it hid."

He was jest about shakin' the life out of me an' I was gurglin' plenty when Nick comes paddin' around an' wants to know what the hell is goin' on. Peters don't let loose till Nick calls help an' opens the cell an' pries him loose.

They take Peters right down to the hole fer that, down in solitary confinement, an' I breathe easier. The P. K. has been stopped fer a time, I figger, in his plan to git rid of Peters.

BUT the next day the P. K. sends fer me. He eyes me cold. "How come you didn't move from Section C when you got the order?" he asks me.

I see then that somethin' had gone wrong an' he hadn't figgered on me bein' with Peters an' gittin' the dope on this escape. "I didn't git no orders to move," I tell him.

The P. K. sends fer Nick Soper, the screw. "Two days ago I gave an order fer this man to be transferred to Section A," he tells Nick. "Why was he still in Section C last night an' the night before that?"

Nick is all upset. He goes back to his desk up at the end of C an' there's the order that a runner had carried over to him an' stuck on the wrong spike. He comes back an' tells that to the P. K.

"Suspended fer a week," raps out the P. K.

Nick goes out with his tail between his legs, an' the P. K. comes back to me. "You been gittin' a good many favors around this joint," he says. "About that little disturbance up in C last night, I think you started that an' had that knife. In fact, I have evidence to that effect. I've talked to the captain of the guard an' he's reversed the punishment. Peters comes out of the hole an' you go in. And serves you right."

I savvy that the P. K. thinks I know too much, an' I'm wonderin' if I'll come out of the hole alive. I can see now that he's a cold-blooded rat an' murder don't mean a thing to him. As long as Peters an' me is both alive he'll be on Uneasy Street.

Down I go to the hole, which is dungeons, an' I see the screws has got orders to treat me rough. I lose all credits by this, too. Layin' down there in the hole I commence figgerin'. The P. K. can pull this stuff now on Peters without me interferin'. By the time I git out of the hole it will all be over with Peters. Jess Hopkins will slip him another knife an' he'll try his escape. An' in the meantime, if I git bumped off by a rap on the dome which a screw can say was due to me resistin' an order or somethin', why, things will be very jake with the P. K., that crooked mouthpiece, an' Peters' brother-in-law. I'm in as tough a spot as Peters.

Much to my surprise, though, I don't git this tap on the coco I'm figgerin' might come my way. I lay down in that stinkin' hole two weeks, when I'm hauled up before the captain of the guard.

He asks me what I was in fer. I tell him the P. K. had had it slipped to me, but I didn't know what it was all about.

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"Captain Walters?" he asks, with a kind of chilly smile.

"Yessir," I say. "The P. K."

"Captain Walters is not P. K. any more," he says. "You may report fer your reg'lar duties tomorrer."

"Yessir," I say, an' the screw takes me out to the yard. They generally let a guy who comes out of the hole spend a day in the yard to get used to the light an' kind of pull hisself together. An' out there I met up with old John—old One-Legged John, who's porter at the storehouse, but don't do nothin' but loaf around.

"Well, buddy," says Old John, "so they snagged you at last. I knowed they would."

"What's the news," I ask Old John, because he always knowed it all. "I been in the hole a couple weeks."

"Well," says Old John, "we got a new P. K."

"So I heard," I tell him. "Who is he?"

"Cap Ingram," says Old John. "They moved him over from night captain of the guard. An' Cap Walters, the old P. K., is over in the county jail waitin' trial."

I guess I gaped like a fish. "Waitin' trial?" I says. "What fer? I been in the hole. I don't know nothin' that's been goin' on."

"Quite a lot has been goin' on," says Old John. "He's waitin' trial fer helpin' a con to escape. A guy named Peters. Why, come to think of it, didn't you cell with Peters?"

"Yeah," I says. "An' did they plug Peters?"

Old John chuckles. "Plug him?" he says. "I should say not! He got a knife an' captures hisself a screw an' walks right out. Boldest escape they ever had in this stir. An' got clean away, buddy, clean away. But some way they traced the knife to that stoolie, Jess Hopkins. Some guy in the electrical shop sees him snitch it an' turned the tables on Jess—stooled on him. An' Jess, bein' the rat he is, he snitched on the P. K. Said the P. K. forced him to give the knife to Peters, an' I guess he proved it because they put the P. K. in jail. An' the P. K. got some lawyer tangled up in it, an' he's in jail too. But Peters, he got clear away."

I was so knocked out I set down on a bench an' stayed there the rest of the day.

BUT say, did Peters clean up on that crook brother-in-law of his? As soon as he got free he goes right to his house, an' he didn't use no meat cleaver this time. He waded in with his two hands an' choked the gizzard plumb out of him, which is what he'd oughta done in the first place. I still got marks on my neck he put there, so I know he could do it. An' then the big sap didn't even try to make his gitaway. He calls up the police an' tells 'em to come git 'im, that he's an escaped con an' has jest croaked a guy.

Yeah, they're hangin' Peters next Friday. Sure, they're gonna top him; no chance fer a commutation or a reprieve. I got word up to him in the death house through Nick Soper that I was sorry, an' he sent back word not to worry about him, that he got enough fun outa chokin' his brother-in-law fer two hangin's, an' he thanked me fer the cigarettes I got Nick to take him. An' me, I don't git my parole, but what the hell? Six years is only six years. But I always did wonder who got the money from that electrical company for that invention of Peters. Peters told Nick he don't know an' don't care.

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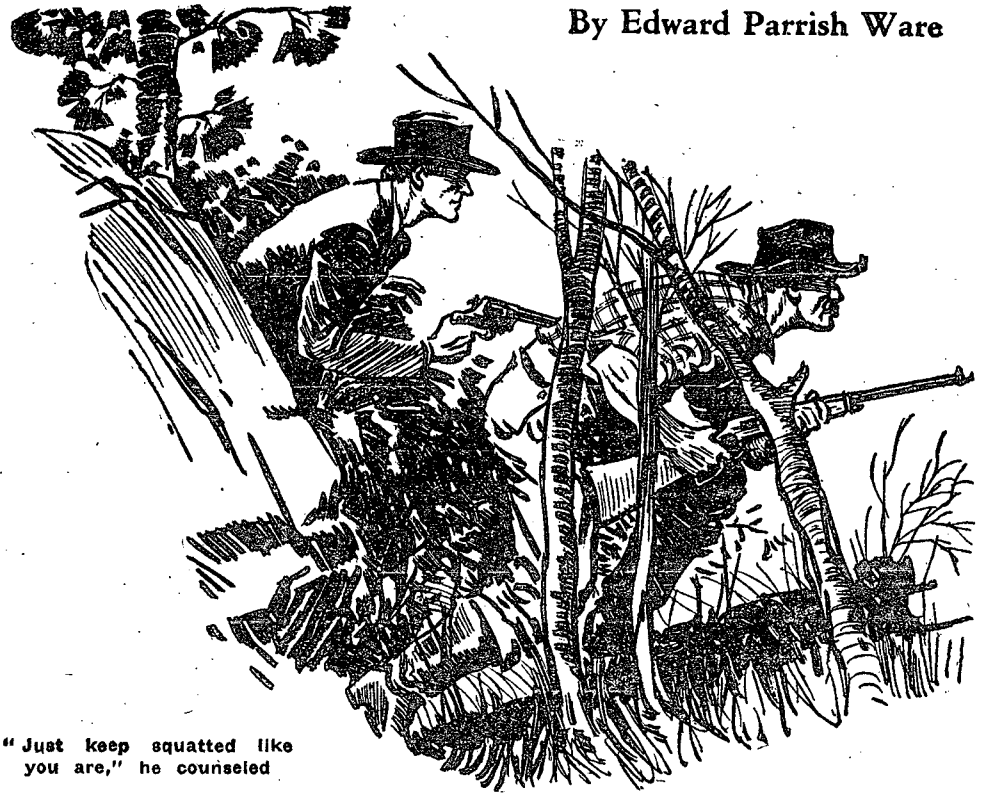
Clue of the Bandit's Beard

By Edward Parrish Ware



"Just keep squatted like you are," he counseled

A False Beard Burning in the Ozark Underbrush Involves Battle McKim in Two Gunfights and Hangs a Murderer

THE covered-wagon outfit climbing the hogback trail from the south was typical of the Ozark country. A ramshackle road-wagon, hickory bows supporting a dingy wagon-sheet, and drawn by a team of shaggy horses. The wagon-sheet had been released from the front bow and allowed to drop down into the bed from the second set, forming a curtain which would protect the interior of the wagon from sun, dust—or, perhaps, from observation. A saddled horse followed on a lead-rope at the rear. The outfit was headed for Blackjack, a mining settlement on the west slope of Brushy Mountain.

On the wagon-seat lounged the driver—so far as could be told, sole occupant of the wagon. He was a tall man dressed in faded overalls, checked shirt, cowhide boots and a wide-brimmed black hat. His lower face was covered by a black beard, curly and about two inches long. A patch of black cloth covered his left eye.

When the long climb had been negotiated and the outfit rolled onto the level ground at the top of the hogback, the driver pulled up and allowed his

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team to blow. He also scanned the surroundings with his good eye. There was not much to see.

On his right stood a commissary, and built against it on the north was the office of the Blackjack Mining Company. Beyond the commissary and office, about half a quarter distant, loomed the buildings of the mine. Cabins and shacks housing the miners were scattered here and there in an irregular pattern. That was all. Just an Ozark zinc-mine settlement.

The bearded driver pushed on and halted in front of the commissary. He got down, looked through the commissary door, saw that only the storekeeper was inside, and passed on to the front of the office. Two men were in the office, one the mine superintendent, the other the cashier.

The bearded man coughed twice. The side of the wagon cover nearest the buildings raised instantly and two men leaped to the ground. They were tall men, dressed as was the driver—and both wore masks. They carried large caliber revolvers. The two in masks rushed into the office.

The bearded man sprang to the horses and began dropping the traces. That done, he unsnapped the neckyoke straps and allowed the wagon-tongue to drop. Next he dragged a pair of saddles from the wagon and cinched them on the backs of the horses, not bothering to remove the harness. He then brought the led-horse from the rear, mounted, drew a revolver and waited.

Inside, as he could see, the cashier was dropping packets of bills into a meal-sack in the hands of one of the bandits. Then the two crooks backed toward the door, ran out, and leaped into their saddles.

The bearded bandit had not taken his glance from the two men inside. Morrow, the superintendent, was a game man. As the thieves fled, he reached for a rifle nearby, caught it up and started for the door. He did not reach it. The bearded man, watching for just such a move, whipped up his six-gun and fired once.

Superintendent Morrow fell with a bullet in his brain.

"Let's go!"

The bearded bandit gave the order, and the three raced out of the village and down the hogback trail.

THE thieves had taken the precaution of cutting the telephone wire from the mine and concealing a length of it. News of the crime did not reach Zinc City, the county-seat fifteen miles away, until more than an hour after it occurred. Approximately two hours after the robbery and murder Sheriff Bob Calloway and his party climbed from dusty flivvers at the mine office.

The covered wagon stood where it had been abandoned, and fifty feet beyond it a big truck loaded with merchandise was parked. Little knots of villagers stood about, and a pall of tragedy, as recognizable as though it could be seen, hung over all.

"Battle" McKim, diminutive detective on Sheriff Calloway's staff, carefully shaved a sliver of tobacco from a thin, dark plug, pouched it in his left cheek, and considered the scene inside the office, while the medical examiner made a superficial examination.

"Morrow died instantly," the doctor said. "Bullet still is in his head. Looks like it might have been a forty-five. That's all."

Sheriff Calloway and the rest of his party stood at one side and watched McKim. The little sleuth's inspection

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of the scene of a crime was so unostentatious, his quietly-stated conclusions so often startled, that he was always a source of deep interest.

It did not take Battle long to extract all the informaion Cashier Tom Wilhite had. He described the entrance of the masked bandits, as well as their appearance, and gave a vague description of the bearded man with the eye-patch who waited outside. The loss had been approximately fifteen thousand dollars.

"We have semi-monthly pay days, and today is one of them," Wilhite explained.

There was nothing familiar in the looks or actions of the three bandits, he replied in answer to a question.

Cook, operator of the commissary, gave a more accurate description of the bearded bandit.

"His beard was black as ink, and fuzzy," he informed McKim. "I couldn't say about his hair, because his hat was pulled low on his head. A black patch was over his left eye. More than that I can't tell you."

Only one other man had information to give. He was Don Sabin, assistant commissary-keeper. Sabin, in Zinc City after a truckload of provisions and store goods, had arrived on the scene a full hour after the robbery. A tall, athletic young man of thirty, he had come from the East a year before to act as assistant to his brother-in-law, Charlie Cook, in charge of the commissary.

"I had stopped on the trail five miles below here," Sabin told the detective, "at the time the robbery occurred. Had to change a rear tire, and it was a tough job on that steep road. I saw nobody on the trail at that time, nor did I meet anybody when I came on up. The bandits must have taken to the hills between here and the spot where I changed the tire."

"The only regular trail between here and a point five miles south," Battle said reflectively, "would be the one eastward toward Duval's Peak—and, incidentally, toward the Oklahoma line. Looks like we got to hunt in that direction."

A posse had been suggested, but the detective had vetoed it. Too much time had elapsed, and, besides, Battle McKim dreaded posses. Too often they merely chased the quarry out of the country, and he had known posses to become bloodthirsty mobs. Sometimes they lynched the wrong persons. So Battle preferred to hunt alone.

He went out and examined the covered wagon. It gave up nothing. The wagon-sheet was old, and the name of the original seller, usually stenciled upon such articles, had long ago been obliterated. The wagon was an ancient Bain, and there were many Bains in the district. There was not a single clue in or about the outfit.

Neither the cashier nor the commissary-keeper could describe the horses better than to say they thought all three were dark bays. If branded, neither saw the brands.

Battle felt that he had got all the information available at the mine, and promptly decided upon what action he should take.

"Bob," he told the sheriff, "I'm going to saunter about in the hills towards Duval's Peak, and see can I find anything of interest. There's nothing more I can do here."

"You're going to saunter about, Bat," the sheriff retorted, "and mebbe get a slug of lead in yore carcass. Better get at this thing from another angle, else take a posse with you."

"Mebbe my luck will hold, Bob," the

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little sleuth argued mildly. "It has, lots of times. And I won't hamper myself with a posse. So long. I'll see you again, sometime."

II

BATTLE drove down the trail in his flivver, located a place five miles south where a truck had stood for some time, doubled back and left the main trail where a narrow and rutted one debouched eastward into the timbered hills. A mile was as far as he could get in the car, and he parked it and got out.

The flinty character of the soil made it impossible to tell whether horses had recently been ridden that way. But Battle knew it to be the best route, almost the only one, the bandits could have followed, and he meant to play the thing that way.

He went through the timber and underbrush, following the course of the trail, but not exposing himself on it, heading for a bench some three miles distant. There a spring poured from the side of a bluff and cut a branch across the trail. If horses had gone that way recently the wet margin of the branch would reveal tracks and betray the fact.

While yet a mile and a half away from the spring, Battle halted in his tracks, listening intently. Somebody, or something, had moved in the brush above him. He took cover quickly back of a boulder, and almost as he did so a man appeared from a clump of sumach fifty feet away. A lank man in overalls, boots and black slouch hat. His face was not bearded, nor did he wear a patch over his left eye—but there was something in the face that caught Battle's interest and aroused his curiosity.

"It's Mace Owen," he said to himself, "and in a rage if ever I saw one. Out for meat!"

The native came slinking along, peering first in one direction then another. A repeating rifle lay crotched in his right arm. Undoubtedly, he was looking for somebody.

He passed the boulder where Battle crouched, and after he had done so the detective took up a stone and tossed it into the brush ahead of him. It fell with a clatter, and the native crouched on the instant, the rifle coming up for action.

Battle left cover swiftly and with the silence of a shadow came up back of the crouched man—and put the muzzle of a six-gun jam up against his spine.

"Just keep squatted like you are," he counseled in his drawly, almost mournful voice. "Too much human life plumb wasted, as it is, without you making me waste yores."

The native remained very still for an instant, then carefully placed his rifle on the ground, muzzle outward, his fingers far from the trigger.

"Reckon I can git up now, can't I?" he asked.

Battle backed away to a safe point, then said:

"Up easy—and don't reach for a belt-gun."

The native got up and turned around, his face still working with anger.

"How's the moonshining business, Mace, since repeal?" the little sleuth inquired in a friendly voice.

"It ain't no worse than it was afore," Owen snapped, "nor yet no better. Since when have you been hunting stills?"

"Not me, Mace," Battle denied in a hurt voice. "I ain't ever interested in stills except when I want to wet my

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beezer. You shorely wasn't out hunting revenuers, I hope?"

"Naw!" Owen spat disgustedly. "I been hunting high and low fur the polecat that set a brush fire at the nawth-east corner of my place, and burnt down four span of rail fence afore I got it in hand. That's who I been hunting—damn him!"

"How long since it was set?"

"Mebbe four hours ago. Can't say

BATTLE McKIM

fur shore. I was back in the hills above here, and seen the smoke. That was a couple hours ago. Whut you doing, traipsing eround in here, Mr. McKim?"

"Looking for me some muscadines," Battle replied solemnly.

"It ain't their season yet."

"I know it," Battle agreed, "but I wanted to get me some vines located, you know, so I'd be able to find them when their season comes. You happen to know where any grows?"

The hillsman eyed the little sleuth closely, then snorted:

"All right! It's yore bizness, and I ain't intrusted in it. I'll be trotting erlong, now, if you ain't got no reason fur stopping me?"

Battle calmly took up Owen's rifle, ejected the cartridges, searched him for other weapons, found none and said:

"Just in case you might mistake me for that polecat you are after, Mace. You can get more cartridges when you get home. I'll keep these. Got a gun of my own they'll fit. So long—and don't shoot at anything until you see the whites of its eyes."

Battle disappeared in the brush, leaving the native swearing hotly, and angled through the woods toward the corner of the field where the brush fire had been. He was interested in that fire, feeling sure it had been set, inadvertently or otherwise, by the escaping bandits. Maybe he'd find something there to establish it as a fact that they had gone that way.

THE fire had burned a patch of about ten acres, and part of Mace Owen's rail fence had been destroyed. Battle stood in the trail, scanning the scene in the hope of finding something unusual which would serve to give him direction. Presently he saw something that caught his regard and held it.

In the crotch of a small bush, its foliage burned away, was an object that looked like a bird's nest. It was scorched badly. Battle walked over to it, wondering why a nest, a thing of grass and twigs, should have survived the fire. A close look, and he knew it was no bird's nest. He removed the object from the crotch with the utmost care.

It puzzled him. As a matter of fact the little sleuth had never seen anything like it before. Almost consumed, it was difficult to determine its exact character. He raised it to his nose and sniffed.

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"Wool," he grunted. "Oily wool. Wool that ain't been washed and sterilized."

He went to the trail and sat down on a log. After a close study of the thing he held in his hand he came to the following conclusion:

The thing had a base of thin white gauze, and to the gauze had been glued sheep's wool which had been dyed black. The under side of the gauze, which had not suffered greatly from the fire, was thick with a brownish substance which had the consistency of a light glue. But the stuff was not ordinary glue at all.

"The head bandit's beard," Battle muttered, his eyes slitting. "Yeah—he had him a home-made set of whiskers. Clever enough, by gollies! When he got here he set a match to the wool and threw the beard away. It landed in the crotch of the bush, caught the foliage and set the brush fire. But it was not down on the ground where it would be consumed—and so I've got the remainders."

Battle placed the remnant of false beard in a pocket, carefully shaved a sliver from a thin, dark plug, pouched it in his left cheek, and gave himself to thought. He now knew that the bandits had gone toward the Oklahoma line. No doubt of it. But he doubted that the objective of the gang was Oklahoma.

When he had chewed one more sliver of tobacco, Battle arose and went farther up into the hills. When he came to the branch across the trail he saw at once that horses had lately crossed there. He knew that the trail was hot, and from there on he proceeded with extra caution.

All the while, McKim's mind wrestled with the task of fathoming the true significance of the wool beard. In it he had a valuable clue. An all-revealing clue, if he could figure it out. But what the hell!

At the top of Duval's Peak a wide crevasse existed. Nobody knew how deep it went, because nobody had ever been able to explore it. Bat guano, deposited in the bowels of the mountain through the centuries, sent up a powerful ammonia gas, and nobody had ever been farther than the rim. Natives told weird stories about the peak, and it was shunned even in the daylight, utterly deserted in darkness.

Darkness caught Battle when the rim of the crevasse was reached, and he looked around for a place to sleep. He shot a fox squirrel with his six-gun, chilled the carcass in a spring and ate supper. Then he parked back of a boulder, pillowed his head on his coat and went to sleep.

It was pitch dark when something awakened him. From somewhere not far off the sound had come. It caused the hair of McKim's head to rise, and the blood in his veins to slow. It was a wailing cry such as he had never heard before. Nothing a human throat could have vented, yet certainly such as no wild animal could have given. It was not the cry of a panther, though panthers had been seen in the section. It was grisly, terrifying, mysterious.

The first cry had aroused Battle. Then had come a second, and it had seemed farther away than the first. Silence after that.

The little sleuth shivered, shrank closer to the boulder, and slid a revolver into his hand. He waited, listening intently. If the cry came again, he hoped to identify it. There was a plausible explanation, and it only needed pinning down.

Not another sound disturbed the

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stillness of the night. Battle took counsel with himself, and gradually a solution came to him. Not a positive one, but one that seemed plausible.

III

McKIM had been a horseman all his life, and he had heard wounded, frightened horses in their dying throes. What he had heard that night was the scream of a horse. A wounded horse, and one in fright.

He swore wrathfully, crouched there against the boulder. The bandits, fearing somebody might recognize the horses, had got rid of them by sending them over the edge of the crevasse to death.

The diminutive detective's ire rose. He got up and picked his way carefully to the edge of the crevasse. There the fumes of ammonia were almost overpowering, and not long to be endured. He dropped down the side of the peak for perhaps a hundred feet, and began circling it from that distance.

The screams had sounded off to the north, and it was the detective's aim to locate the exact spot. It would be an odd thing if he could not back-track the horses, and locate the place in which the bandits had taken cover. They had waited until night to dispose of the horses, making sure they would not be seen, and it followed that they were acquainted in the vicinity and that a hide-out was not far away.

Battle McKim was getting hot—and he knew it!

Dawn came, and he pursued his search. Thee-quarters of a mile from where he had lain down to sleep Battle found something that made his gray eyes flare dangerously, and his lips set in a grim line.

He found a spatter of blood on the soil and rocks just at the crater's rim, and envisioned the scene which had been enacted there. The horses had been led up to the edge of the crater, knocked on the head with an ax and pushed over. One of the animals had not been killed instantly, and it was the screams of that doomed beast which had awakened the detective.

Battle cast about like a redbone hound on the trail of a 'coon, and finally picked up the dim path up which the horses had been led. He followed it downward for half a mile, where it turned and trailed along a narrow bench for half a quarter. A bit farther along he smelled woodsmoke, and thereafter he moved as silently as a ghost. Two hundred yards farther he stopped in the shelter of a boulder and looked down into a tiny valley.

A one-room log cabin, centering a small clearing, was what he saw. Smoke was curling from a stick-and-mud chimney, and there was nobody in sight. That it was his objective, the bandits' hide-out, the detective had no doubt.

Battle cut a sliver from his thin, dark plug, and regarded it thoughtfully. Presently he nodded as though in answer to something the little sliver had said to him, pouched it in his cheek, and started dropping rapidly down toward the valley.

It was very early in the morning, and Battle figured that the fire in the cabin had only just been started. He had searched for and found a path leading from the cabin down into a wooded draw, and he knew what that meant. There would be a spring in the draw.

He found the spring, and concealed himself in a clump of brush close to it. The men in the cabin would want fresh water, and signs around the spring informed the detective that nobody had

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been there that morning. That somebody would come he had no doubt.

Presently a man came along the path, a bucket in hand. Battle, peering through a peep-hole in the brush, recognized the man.

"Lafe Carse, as sure as shootin'!" he exclaimed to himself. "And his partner, one of 'em at least, will be Abe Narramore. Got tired of moonshining and petty stealing, and decided to get some heavy money. I'll be doggoned! Some fellers just can't let well enough alone."

Carse, tall and lean, came down the path into the draw. He was whistling. When he stooped over to dip his bucket in the spring, Battle emerged from cover, his six-gun swung high. Something warned Carse, however, and before Battle could strike Carse leaped aside and whipped out his gun.

Battle's weapon ripped the silence to shreds, and Carse died there by the spring.

"Yore fault, Carse," the little sleuth said sorrowfully. "I only aimed to stun you—but you wouldn't have it that way. I just had to do it!"

He darted to the edge of the brush and fixed his glance on the door of the cabin. A tall native appeared there almost instantly, a gun in hand. Battle leaped out of cover, gun raised.

"Elevate, Narramore," he commanded, voice snapping like a bullwhip. "Go high—quick!"

Narramore went high with his right hand—a gun in it.

Again Battle's six-shooter spat flame and Narramore tumbled out of the doorway, fell on his face, and lay still.

Battle waited. Nobody else appeared. As the little sleuth saw the situation, nobody else would appear. After a bit he went to the cabin, entered it and looked around. It was rudely furnished, and the detective's subsequent search did not require long. He struck pay-dirt almost at once.

Under a bunk he found an old knapsack. The knapsack contained the Blackjack pay roll!

BATTLE sat down and thoughtfully shaved another sliver from his thin, dark plug. Presently he got up and went out to a small barn in the rear. There he found two sorrel horses. He found something else.

A sheep's hide, once used for a saddle pad, lay under a manger. A quantity of wool had been cut away. Wool with which the bandit's beard had had been made.

He went back into the house and searched again. It was not long until he found, in a cupboard, something else enlightening. It was a small bottle wrapped in something one would hardly expect to find in that part of the backwoods.

The bottle contained a brownish liquid which had an ether smell, and it was wrapped in a cover page of *The Billboard*.

Battle pocketed the package, took up the knapsack and went out to the barn. There he saddled one of the sorrels, mounted and rode away. He had got two of the three bandits, recovered the loot, and had a clue that talked in a language he could understand.

"The leader of this gang," he reflected as he rode toward the county-seat, "is a bird that has been in the show business. Maybe a professional, maybe an amateur. If he had used just common, ordinary glue—but he didn't. So he knows his way about in the show business!"

When he reached the sheriff's office he found a wakeful, anxious officer there. Calloway was as angry as he

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ever permitted himself to get with his ace.

"Where the hell have you been, Bat?" he demanded.

"Been several places," Battle told him, tossing the knapsack on the desk. "I prospected one place, got two men and fifteen grand in cold cash. But I want it kept quiet until I round up the hombre I'm really after."

"Whom did you knock off?" Calloway broke in. "Who was them two men?"

"Carse and Narramore. You know 'em both. Now don't bother me, Bob, until I'm ready to talk. I want a big shot of hootch and some ham and eggs. Then I'll wash this little matter up, and mebbe get me some sleep."

WHEN Don Sabin, assistant commissary clerk at Blackjack Mines, entered the cabin where he had his quarters, at five o'clock that afternoon, he looked smug and happy. He was even whistling a blithe tune. But the smug, happy look vanished from his face, and the tune broke on a shrill note. The cause of the changes lay exposed on a table in the center of the room.

On the table lay a charred mass that looked like nothing in particular. Spread out beside it was a rumpled and stained cover from a copy of *The Billboard*. On the cover stood a small bottle half filled with a brownish liquid.

Sabin's lean face paled to the color of putty, and his eyes bulged. He reached a hand to his throat, dropped it, then stared wildly about him. The next instant he was making a wild dash for the door.

The door swung open abruptly, and a small, lean man appeared on the sill. A man with sorrowful eyes, and a mournful expression on his face.

"I'd take it slow, son," the little man counseled, "if I was you. There ain't no use dying before you have to. Narramore and Carse have done checked out, and I'd grieve mightily to see you go the same way. Just sit down, and let's you and me talk easy and quiet. What you say?"

"By God!" Sabin cried hoarsely. "Get out of my way!"

His right hand slanted for his hip—but froze steady when he found the muzzle of a six-gun staring him in the face.

Battle advanced into the room, motioning Sabin back toward a chair. His eyes were no longer kindly, and his face had lost that sorrowful look. When he spoke his voice was cold and deadly.

"Sit down!" he commanded.

Sabin dropped into a chair. McKim removed a six-gun from a holster on his hip, pocketed it, then sat on the opposite side of the table.

"I'm arresting you, Sabin," he said, "for the robbery of the Blackjack Mining Company, and the murder of superintendent Morrow. Got anything to say about it?"

"Only that you are a damned liar and a fool!" Sabin snapped. "Trust a hick cop—"

"Enough of that," came coldly from McKim. "Here's the play. You plotted the robbery, using Carse and Narramore as your accomplices. You parked your motor truck yesterday morning, just as you said you did, but there the truth ends. You changed your clothes, put on a false beard you had made, placed a patch over your left eye, then drove the covered wagon up to the mine. After the robbery you rode down the trail, changed back to your usual clothes, got into your truck and drove back up here.

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"You made several mistakes. You gave your clothes and your false beard to your pals, with instructions to get rid of the beard. They attempted to get rid of the beard by setting it on fire and tossing it down beside the road to be consumed. It didn't work. I found the beard. The beard told me a lot.

"It told me, as plain as words could speak, that a theatrical man had fashioned it. Why? Because a non-professional would have used ordinary mucilage or glue in making the beard and in sticking it on the face. Such a man would not know that ordinary glue will not stand up under heat and perspiration. A simple solution of powdered resin and ether, however, will stand up—and that was what was used on the beard. Only a man with some theatrical experience would know that.

"You are comparatively a stranger here. I know most everybody else, and nobody I knew has ever had anything to do with the stage. So I picked on you. I came here this afternoon, found the place filled with old copies of *The Billboard* and other theatrical journals—and found the identical copy of *The Bilboard* from which that crumpled cover was torn." He indicated the cover which had been wrapped around the bottle. "So, Sabin, I planted the stuff here—and watched your reactions. That's all—except that you must come along with me."

Don Sabin regarded the little man out of haggard eyes. He thought things over for a moment, saw that there was no escape for him—and held out his wrists.

"That's right sensible of you," Battle said with a sigh of relief, and snapped the handcuffs on. "I was right fearful you was going to act up—and two kills in one day is a whole plenty for me!"

Two Do Time for Crimes of Doubles

FOR crimes committed by their doubles two men have gone to jail in recent months. John Long of Peru, Ind., served four months of a possible life term in Statesville Prison, Illinois. In Cincinnati Heber Hicks spent three weeks in jail. They gained freedom only after the arrest of their doubles.

Witnesses identified Long as a bandit and a jury pronounced him guilty of robbery with arms. He was given a year-to-life sentence. Presently Edward Brethauer was arrested for a holdup and confessed those of which Long stood convicted. The witnesses against Long looked at Brethauer and said he was the robber. Judge Donald McKinlay then set aside the conviction and entered a verdict of not guilty to clear Long's record. The falsely convicted man went home declaring himself "the luckiest guy in the world," and said that he "wasn't mad at anybody."

Heber was charged with a series of drug store robberies. Two victims "identified" him. He could have been bailed, but decided to stay in jail, maintaining that the best proof of his innocence would be continuance of the robberies while he was locked up. More drug stores were held up and one of the two bandits caught in the act bore an uncanny resemblance to Hicks. The men who had "identified" him now identified his double, and he was freed.

—*Emory Black*

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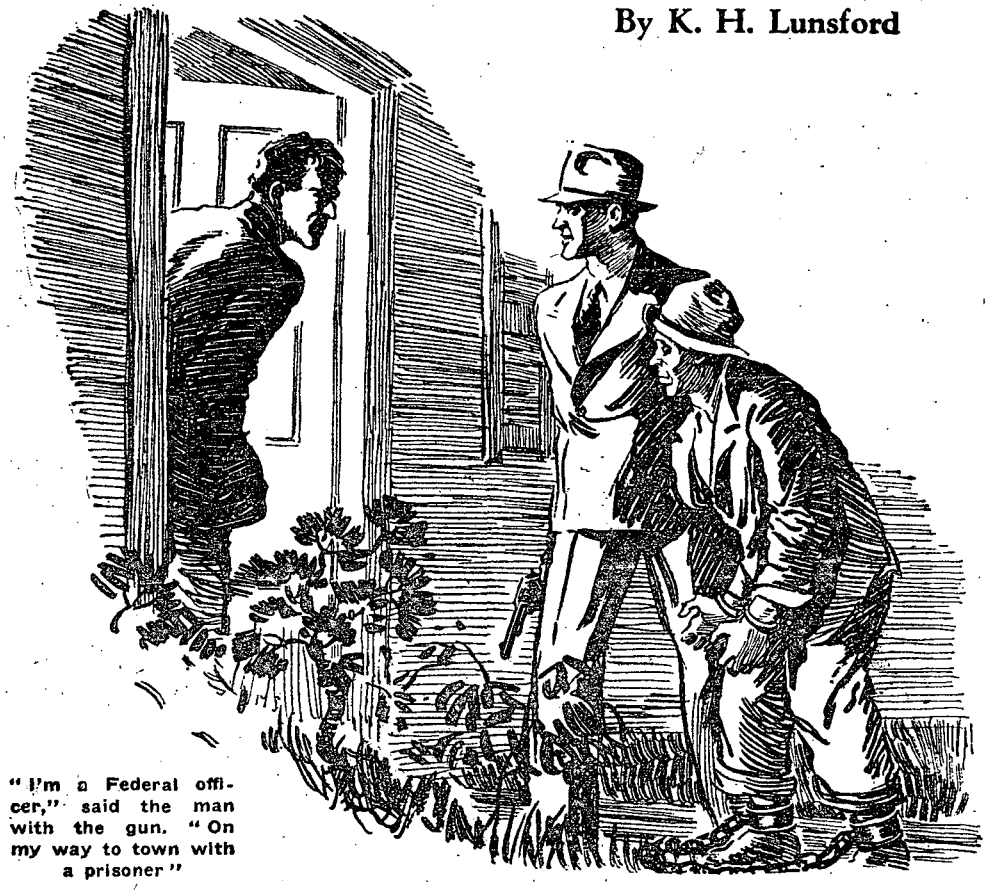
The Manacled Man

By K. H. Lunsford



"I'm a Federal officer," said the man with the gun. "On my way to town with a prisoner"

A Knock in the Night, and Hormack Opened His Door to Two Strangers—the Man Who Said He Was a Federal and His Scarred, Silent Captive

HORMACK, playing solitaire in the kitchen, glanced up as the old wall clock struck once.

"Half-past ten!" he mumbled, as he stretched himself. "Better—"

A sudden noise at the front of the house claimed his attention. Someone was knocking at the door. For a moment he sat very still, except that his glance shifted uneasily about. He seemed to be listening.

The knocking sounded again. Hormack, unbending his six feet, three inches of well-knit frame, rose from his seat, only to stand for a time without further movement. The knocking was repeated at regular intervals.

Finally he started across the room. When he had almost reached the door leading into the front room, he stopped suddenly, went back, and slipped into the coat that had been hanging on the

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back of his chair. From one of its side pockets he brought out a short barreled revolver of heavy caliber. Swiftly he examined it, twirling the cylinder. Satisfied, apparently, he returned it to his coat pocket. His hand remained in the pocket. With his other hand, he picked up the kerosene lamp, carried it into the front room, and placed it on a table before going to the door upon which the intermittent pounding persisted. Keeping carefully to one side, he opened the door ever so slightly.

Two men stood on the porch. One was a husky looking fellow of perhaps thirty, almost as tall as Hormack himself. He it was who had been rapping on the door, not with his knuckles, but with the barrel of a .38. Hormack was quick to notice that the stranger continued to hold the gun in his hand, though with no suggestion of threat.

The other was short . . . extremely so . . . but stocky. His clothing was rough and disheveled. His hat evidently had been thrust carelessly on his head by someone else. The cheek beneath his left eye was somewhat discolored, and a hideous scar zigzagged luridly along his jaw from ear to chin. Hormack's attention was caught, and held, however, by the leg-irons the fellow wore . . . heavy ones joined by a length of chain . . . a far more uncommon sight than the handcuffs on his wrists.

"Well!" exclaimed the man with the revolver. "I was sure there was someone at home. I saw a light as I was coming in from the road. I'm a Federal officer on my way to town with a prisoner. Car broke down about a half a mile back. Busted up too much for road repairs. So I started looking for help. Lonely spot along here. This is the first house I've come to. Didn't see any poles or wires coming in, so I don't suppose you've got a phone!"

Hormack shook his head without taking his gaze from the manacled man.

"Got a car, or any kind of a conveyance I can hire?"

This time Hormack turned his head toward the officer, but only to shake it again.

"Car's in town," he grunted.

The newcomer considered a moment, then gestured resignedly. "Looks like you're going to have company, then. I can't stay up all night out here watching this fellow. And he isn't," the officer nodded toward the prisoner, and chuckled softly, "exactly dressed for hiking. And he's about all in, anyway!"

He took a short step forward, one hand on the stocky fellow's arm. Hormack, however, made no move to swing back the door. Noticing this, the man with the revolver stopped and looked his apparently unwilling host straight in the eyes.

"Unless," he said in a slightly changed tone of voice, "you've got some special reason for not wanting company tonight!"

"'Sall right!" Hormack mumbled hurriedly.

Moving aside, he opened the door. There was no look of welcome on his face but the man who had knocked ignored this. Guiding his prisoner ahead of him, he stepped inside. Hormack closed the door, his glance following the man in irons as the latter clanked across the floor to sink wearily into a chair. Seated, he regarded his captor and host with a sullen sneer.

"You'll be paid for this, of course!" The officer turned to Hormack. "And I'll want you to go to some neighbor in the morning and hire some sort of

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rig that will get us to town. All alone, here?"

Hormack nodded. The stranger glanced around.

"If you've got an extra bunk, I'll bed this fellow down." He turned to the prisoner. "All right . . . you!"

Scowling, the man got back on his feet. Hormack picked up the lamp, and led them into side room, where he motioned toward a small iron cot. There were no sheets. The pillow and blankets were not very clean.

"Best I can do," he said, half-apologetically.

"Okay. Hold that lamp over this way a minute."

Hormack did so, watching with interest. The government man thrust his .38 into a shoulder holster, jerked off the prisoner's hat, removed his shoes, threw back the top blanket, and permitted the man to lie down. Unlocking the handcuff from the fellow's left wrist, the officer snapped it around the tubular metal headrail of the cot. This done, he drew another pair of handcuffs from his pocket, pulled up the blanket at the foot of the bed, and closed one end of the cuffs about the footrail and the other so that it encircled the chain joining the leg-irons.

"There you are," he said. "One hand and both feet fastened, yet you'll be able to move about enough for comfort." He tested both pairs of handcuffs to make sure they were locked, adjusted the blanket over the prisoner's body, straightened, and looked about.

THE room was scantily furnished, its floor uncarpeted. There were two windows, one at the front, and one at the side of the house. He went first to one and then to the other, opening them, leaning out, and gazing about as if in careful survey of everything distinguishable in the starlight. For some reason his revolver was again in his hand. He closed the front window and fastened its catch before leaving it. The side window he left partly open for ventilation. He drew both of the shades all the way down.

Turning at last, he cast a final glance at the man on the cot. Apparently satisfied, he gestured to Hormack and followed him into the other room, stopping to close the door behind them. Hormack, placing the light on the table, stood for a moment as though undecided before slouching over and sitting down in the chair the manacled man had so briefly occupied. His hand long since had left his coat pocket, yet he did not seem entirely at ease. Rolling a cigarette, he lit it and sat there, puffing away silently, regarding his self-invited guest from beneath drooping eyelids.

The Federal man proceeded to make himself at home. Going over to the table, he laid his revolver on it, pulled up a chair, took off his coat and holster, hung them over the back of it, and sat down. From various pockets he produced several official looking papers and a fountain pen.

"Might as well make out my report on this delay." He wrote rapidly for a moment, stopped, and looked up. "What's your name?" he asked. "Have to say where I spent the night, and report it so you'll get paid for all this trouble."

"Hormack."

"Hormack, eh?" The officer frowned, and repeated the name thoughtfully. "Any relation to the fellow they picked up the other day in connection with that big mail robbery at the Springs?"

Hormack shifted in his chair.

"Brother," he admitted, finally.

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The government man straightened, stared, then spoke slowly, shaking his head. "Well, what do you know about that?"

Hormack made no reply. The officer suddenly leaned forward.

"I've certainly got some good news for you!" He jerked one hand toward the side room. "Know who that is in there?"

Hormack shook his head.

"He's the guy, or one of 'em, that really pulled the job over at the Springs!" The officer leaned back to enjoy his host's surprise.

Hormack remained silent. The cigarette in his left hand stopped in its journey to his mouth. His right hand gripped the edge of his chair.

"And my car," the other fellow continued, "breaks down and lands the two of us here ... of all places! Can you tie that?" He slowly shook his head, turned back to the table, and picked up his pen. "Well, they'll turn your brother loose when I get in with this bozo. After all, it's a Federal case." He faced around toward Hormack again. "It was the sheriff who arrested your brother, wasn't it?"

Hormack nodded.

"Found his car in the ditch after the getaway, or something like that, didn't they?"

Hormack had lost his indolent slouch. His pose of surly indifference vanished, too.

"Yeah! And wouldn't let him explain!" His tone was indignant, even a little excited. He got to his feet and began moving aimlessly about the room.

The officer shook his head. "County men are apt to be a bit hasty at times. But I understand they just held him for investigation ... he isn't actually charged with the crime. The way I heard it, no one actually saw him at the Springs, and they didn't locate him anywhere near the scene. Where did they find him, anyway?"

Hormack snorted. "Right here at home, in bed! Come a-bustin' in here at night with pistols in their hands like we was a couple o' murderers or something! Tore up the whole place lookin' for the stuff that was stole! Even ripped open the mattresses! And didn't find a thing! Couple o' deputies wanted to take me along, too, but the sheriff's known me for ten years. I've been around here all my life. Reckon they think that just because Eben's been away until a short time ago that they can pin something on him. The sheriff knows me, and knows—"

"How long since your brother came back home?"

"Been back for a couple o' months, now. Why?" suspiciously.

"Just wondered. Doesn't matter, anyway. The whole thing'll be over as soon as we get in tomorrow. I've got the real crook. No doubt about that. I caught him with the goods. Had the stuff right on him. Having it in his possession is enough to convict him. He says he found it. Found it!" The officer guffawed. "Can you imagine anyone dumb enough to believe a yarn like that?"

"Sounds fishy," said Hormack, as he rolled another cigarette.

"I'll say it does! He found it where he had it buried. I hope no one finds it tonight. Had it right in my car ... but I hid it ... cleverly enough, I think, so that no one will find it tonight. Couldn't carry it with me."

"Maybe I better guard it for you," suggested Hormack. "Where'd you break down?"

"Half a mile east." The Federal man pointed. "But I don't think you'd

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better bother. Folks might say strange things on account of your brother."

"Yeah . . . they might."

II

THE officer returned to his writing, and for several minutes all was quiet in the room save for the scratch of pen on paper, and the tramping of feet as Hormack slowly paced the floor. When the report was finished, Hormack went over and sat down, only to get up again almost immediately and continue his meaningless moving about the room.

The visitor ignored the man's apparent restlessness. He gathered his papers together, put them in his pocket, and glanced at his watch.

"No bed for me tonight," he announced. "I'm taking no chances. I may cat-nap a bit in the easy chair there, dropping in to give that fellow the once over now and then. Of course," he chuckled, "he can't very well leave without taking the cot along with him, but"—he lowered his voice suddenly—"well, I'm not so sure that job at the Springs was a one-man affair. Only one man pulled the actual robbery. We know that. But I figure he may have had a pal in on it for the getaway. If he did, the other guy would know by now that he's arrested, and he might tag along and try to start something. Get the idea?"

Apparently he expected no answer. He did not wait for one.

"That's all it is, just an idea. But on my job, it pays to have ideas . . . sometimes. That's why I was taking this mountain road in instead of the better one down in the valley . . . and why I didn't fancy the notion of staying outdoors the rest of the night . . . and why you see me keeping one hand near my gun."

"Good ideas," his host grunted.

For the first time the stranger appeared to notice that Hormack seemed unable to keep still. Apparently he drew his own conclusions.

"Look here, man. No reason at all for this to bother you. There's only one chance in a thousand that any accomplice of this fellow—and remember, I don't even know that he's got a pal—has trailed us here. Even if he did, you won't need to mix in. No need losing your sleep, either. Go on to bed. I'll stand watch and call you about five. Want to get an early start."

"Yeah, might as well turn in, I guess. Gettin' late?" He glanced at the big wall clock. "I'll lock up, out back. Think I'll make a cup of coffee. Like to have a cup?"

"If you're going to make it anyway. Don't go to any bother."

"No trouble! Fire's still goin'!"

The stranger's gaze did not follow him as Hormack crossed the room, and went into the unlighted kitchen, where he could be heard moving about, opening, closing, and fastening the door, and putting something on the stove. Several minutes passed before he came back into the front room, carrying two cups of steaming coffee.

The government man had moved over by the table. He was leisurely filling a pipe. He looked up as Hormack entered, and sniffed.

"Smells good. Help me to keep awake, too!"

"Never bothers my sleepin'," said Hormack. He seemed more cheerful than at any time since his uninvited guests had arrived. "Well, here's to clearin' up the mystery."

The two men sipped their coffee in silence, pushed back their empty cups after a couple of minutes. Hormack got to his feet again.

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"Going to need the lamp?" asked the officer.

Hormack shook his head as he started across to what evidently was his own room on the opposite side of the house from the one assigned to the manacled man. Without looking around, he muttered something he might have intended as "*good-night,*" opened the door, stepped inside, and closed it behind him.

Having shut the door, he bolted it. For a long minute he made no further movement. Standing there, head bent forward, he did not seem so much to be listening as to be lost in thought, undecided about something. The whole house had grown amazingly still. Nothing could be heard except the ticking of the wall clock.

Finally he turned and stepped toward a bed that could be seen plainly in the light from a window, stopped, appeared to hesitate, then went quickly and noiselessly back to the door, dropped on one knee and looked through the keyhole. He could see only the feet and lower part of the legs of the man in the armchair. After a bit he got up, went over to the window and raised both its shade and sash considerably higher, after which he sat down on the bed and rolled a cigarette. He had just lit it when his head came up, his manner instantly tense. Sounds were coming from the other room.

Rising swiftly, he tiptoed over and knelt once more, his eye at the keyhole. He could see nothing now of the man in the other room, but he could hear him moving about, finally opening the door into the room occupied by the man in manacles. The man's movements seemed slow and sluggish, but he was, apparently, only carrying out his announced intentions of going in to look at his prisoner occasionally. Something of Hormack's tension eased, yet he remained there on his knees until he heard the other door close again and the government man came back into view, sat down in the armchair, leaned over, untied his shoes and removed them, then drew a straight-backed chair closer, put his feet up on it, and settled himself back restfully. Once again all was silent except the clock that ticked.

HORMACK rose to his feet at last and went to the window, walking slowly. His cigarette had gone out. He relit it and stood for several minutes, smoking and staring out into the starlight with eyes that did not seem to see. He rolled and smoked a second cigarette.

Turning, finally, he took off his coat and hung it over a chair. Then he sprawled across the bed, without turning back the covers or removing any more of his clothing. His eyes did not close, and he did not sleep.

He sat up on the edge of the bed again after perhaps three-quarters of an hour, rolled and smoked another cigarette. He got up then, went to the window and stood for a moment before he picked up his coat and put it on, patting the revolver in its pocket, reassuringly. Walking on the balls of his feet, he crossed the room and knelt once more at the door.

The man in the other room evidently had turned the wick of the lamp well down. He could still be seen in the dim light, however, sitting in the armchair with his feet up on the other one. He made no movement, no sound. Hormack rose after a little and went back to the window. Catlike, he stepped out through it, without any noise, to the ground.

He took several rapid steps, keeping

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close to the side of the house, then turned with his back against it. His gaze searched all about. Each stump and stone, each bit of underbrush, every tree was familiar to him. He waited for several minutes, watching and listening. No sound or movement could have escaped him. Finally he made his way to the front of the building.

The revolver was out in his hand now. He skirted the porch, and dodged into the shadows at the side of the room where the prisoner was being kept. The window shade lacked only an inch or two of being flush with the sill, but by stooping, he could see into the room. The door connecting with the front room had swung partly open. Hormack remembered the faulty catch. He could see through into the front room.

The officer still sprawled out on the two chairs. His shoes were off. His shirt was opened at the throat. He had finished smoking and his pipe lay beside his revolver on the table at his side. He was, quite obviously, sound asleep, settled comfortably for the rest of the night.

Hormack crouched there several minutes, gun in hand, staring in at him, and listened intently for some sound indicating that the prisoner might be awake. He recalled the man's weariness, however, and decided that he probably had dropped into a deep sleep almost immediately.

No sound came from within. Shackled as he was, there seemed little chance that he would cause the government man any alarm, or make it necessary for him to rise and move about on any tour of investigation.

Hormack moved out a short distance from the house and stopped again. His head turning slowly, his keen eyes once more probed every shadow, his hearing strained to catch the slightest noise above the whispering of the wind.

For a time there was nothing. Then suddenly his head jerked up. Had that been something that stirred ever so little ... a darker shadow among the shadows?

He leaned forward, raising his gun instinctively. Long, quick strides took him to the edge of the clearing at the spot where he had, for an instant, seemed to see something move. There he paused. For minutes he stood silent, motionless, every sense alert. He saw nothing that was not as it should be ... heard nothing but the rustling of the night breeze in the leaves overhead.

Convinced at last that his eyes had deceived him, he moved off between the trees with the soundless stealth of a hunting animal. But he did not go east, turning instead directly south, directly away from the road. Gradually his speed increased as he left the house behind, but there was no let-up on his wariness. Twice he halted abruptly, thinking he had heard an unusual noise. The second time he even retraced his steps for thirty or forty yards to investigate. Finding nothing amiss after carefully searching about, he resumed his journey even more hurriedly on account of the delay. Coming to a stretch of higher ground with but few trees, he almost trotted in his growing haste.

FIVE minutes later he again paused abruptly, glanced cautiously all around, then swung sharply to the left, crossed over and stopped at the foot of a gaunt, storm-twisted pine. Pulling away a pile of loose brush, he dropped to his knees, put the revolver

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down beside him, produced a sheath knife and began poking and prodding the ground with its heavy blade, loosening the soil enough to scoop it away with his hands. His breath grew labored and his acts and manner became affected by some strange anxiety.

The task grew easier as it progressed, the earth finally becoming so soft that he was able to discard the knife. He toiled that much faster, pawing away the dirt with both hands, seeming suddenly to be seized with a sort of frenzy.

At last, bending lower with a hoarse exclamation, he scraped about frantically, jerked and tugged at something, and started to rise, clutching it in his hands.

Oddly excited, entirely engrossed in what he was doing, the noise suddenly made by a rock that hurtled and bounced, clattering about among the trees, caught him so completely off-guard that, startled, the thought of the revolver at his feet did not come to him. Midway in the act of rising, he automatically continued to an erect position, his fingers clinging instinctively to what he held.

Upright, he stood for an instant with no power of motion before turning his head. The moon was up now, and he stared dazedly at what he saw. His mouth sagged open as he recognized the man standing there a few yards from him.

The stocky fellow was wearing no handcuffs ... no leg-irons now. He had no hat on, either, and one could see that the black eye and the scar on the jaw had been wiped off like so much paint. A competent looking Colt .38 was in one hand as he advanced casually.

"So Jimmy's story of finding the swag finally got you to digging, eh?" The stranger flashed a light over the scene, and kicked aside Hormack's revolver. "I certainly had a wait for you, though. Began to think you never would leave the house. My partner came in and unlocked me right after you went to your room, and a good thing he did, I guess. Told me he was pretty sure you'd doped him."

"Aw, he'll be okay," snarled Hormack. "Only a sleeping powder."

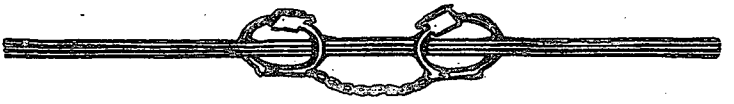
"He'd better be all right. You nearly caught me napping that one time, too, while I was trailing you."

He dropped the flashlight on the soft earth, the light still aglow. It gave him an idea, and he wedged it into the pile of soil so that the circle of light encompassed Hormack.

This done, he stepped closer, gun alert. The big fellow simply stood there with dropped jaw and unbelieving eyes. There was a glint of metal in the light and the click of handcuffs.

"I'm a Federal officer, too, Hormack," he felt it necessary to explain. "And Jimmy's idea that your brother had an accomplice seems to have been entirely correct. You're under arrest!"

Reaching over then, he carefully, almost gently removed the mail sack from Hormack's bound and nerveless hands.



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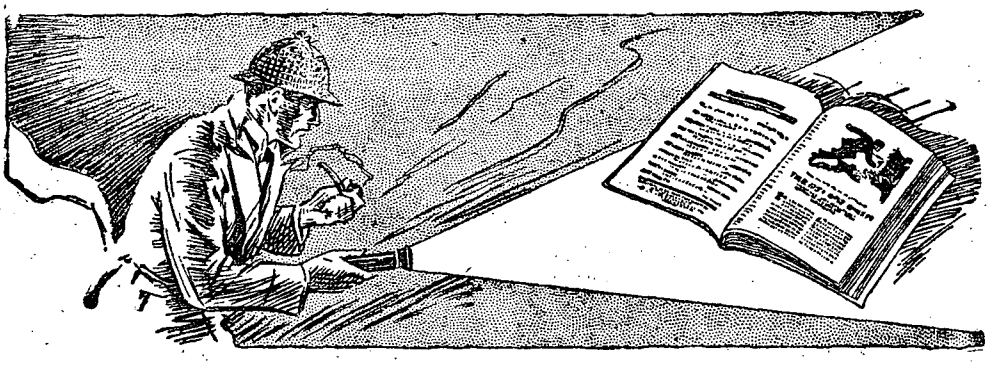

Flashes From Readers

Where Readers and Editors Get Together to Gossip and Argue, and Everyone Speaks Up His Mind

We pay one dollar for each letter published in this department. Checks are mailed after magazine goes on sale.

A LIFE GUARD, an umbrella maker, a news vendor, a telegrapher, an attendant in a waxworks museum, housewives, and a lot of others have written us and told us what they do for a living. Their letters made interesting reading and many of you wrote in to say that you enjoyed them. But what about your own job? We'd like to hear what more of you do. You may think your job is dull because to you it's only a daily grind. But somebody else is going to think it's a first class occupation. Let's hear about it. Remember we pay one dollar for every letter we publish.

DETECTS HANGING THREADS

DEAR EDITOR:

When one has been gently dismissed, amidst pomp and ceremony (very willing but inexperienced), from high school, with a beautiful crisp diploma, one's very enthusiastic and thinks that it will be but a short time till one makes a noise in the business world.

Oh ho! I certainly acquired experience with a vengeance pounding sidewalks to and fro. So—Presto—

I am working as an examiner in a dress factory. Since it is a small factory I do more work than most examiners. I take the dresses which have been pressed and after cutting away the hanging threads from the hem, cuffs, etc., I examine them to see if they have been well sewed, undamaged, clean, and tagged with the correct size. Then I pin or sew on an article of adornment, slip the belt in and with two or three pins adjust it so as to give the dress a chic look.

Sometimes I have to operate a snap-sewing machine or a pinking machine (this cuts a zigzag on the inside seams of the dresses so as to prevent unraveling). Other times I help out putting together cuts of material in bundles, that is, the skirts, waists, sleeves, cuffs, etc., so that the operators can sew them together.

Yes, it's not a particularly difficult or interesting position, that's why I'm hoping I'll be a little lucky and land an interesting and pleasant job that will give me a chance to learn what makes the wheels of business go around.

CONSUELO MANGINO,
New York City.

BETTER THAN THE BEST

DEAR SIRS:

Your tenth anniversary number can be summed up very briefly by saying that it exceeded even the best of your issues, which makes it the best magazine ever published at any price, in its class.

Ten years is a long time to live up to a fine standard that comes as close to perfection as any mortal thing can. In keeping with your policy

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of publishing the "everyday" jobs of your readers, I have attempted to set down everything I've had my hand in in that time.

During all that time, the only thing that I've continued to do is going to school during the evenings. I've crossed the Atlantic five times, I have been in over 100 cities in the States, I've been a bell-hop, errand and messenger boy. I've "flung" sodas, sold papers, and written for some. I've been a file-clerk, order clerk, and stock clerk. I've sold tobaccos, men's furnishings, and run a rental library. I've even sold perfume, and now I advertise it.

Continue your good magazine at all costs.

Sincerely yours,

PAT,
New York City.

"TRUE TO LIFE"

GENTLEMEN:

As a constant reader of your excellent magazine for years I know about what to expect, but seldom have you printed anything which comes up to "I Am a Dope Fiend."

This article is accurate to a fault. A friend of mine who was for several years a narcotic squad man read it twice and enjoyed both times. He said it was remarkably true to life.

During years in large cities, I have come into contact with quite a number of "junkies" and it is my experience that when they are loaded with cocaine they are usually locked up in a room, poking papers in the key hole and under the doors to keep "steve" out and not out holding up banks as the tabs would have us believe.

Your other stories are accurate and entertaining. An error is sometimes made, but if it's a good story, what difference does it make if the victim was shot with a .45 derringer when everyone knows they are .41 caliber?

Yours truly,

LEO J. DICHE,
Salina, Kan.

D. F. W. ON THE MIDWAY

DEAR SIRS:

I am a carnival barker just home for the winter. I am going to rest my weary bones these long winter evenings by reading DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY. Let me tell you how I came in contact with your great magazine. As you know, a real carnival barker only works at night. It was in the month of June and we were "playing" a small town in W. Va. I was walking along the midway when I saw another barker about to dispose of your magazine. I quickly seized it and began to read it. Believe it or not, I enjoyed one full week of entertainment from your magazine. After I finished your magazine, I went to work on the cross-word puzzle and the cipher secrets. It was not an uncommon sight to see "shills, razorbacks, cashiers, operators, and barkers," all helping me on the puzzle and the ciphers. My main interest in writing this letter is that I would like to see a detective story concerning the carnival in print. As a carnival is a gathering place for all sorts of people from all over the world, I think that a very interesting detective story can be written. I am going to conclude this letter, by saying that as long as DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY can supply a week's entertainment for such a low price, I will be a constant reader both at home and on the carnival. Hoping to see a detective story concerning the carnival soon, I remain,

Very truly yours,

DANIEL NISIVOCCIA,
Newark, N. J.

"DRESSED FOUL"

DEAR EDITOR:

My business takes me on foot from house to house not only into the large towns and cities, but into out-of-the-way rural sections and amongst fisher folk and seafaring men on some of the islands off the Maine coast. Naturally, I see and hear strange and odd "happenstances" and peculiar and humorous sayings and stories.

There's that covered horse-drawn wagon of a fish peddler on the coast lettered on sides, "Clams and Sea-Gulls" (don't laugh—it's true). Whether intentional or a prank, I don't know. In the interior of Big Deer Isle there's a rude sign in front of a farmhouse with the legend, "Dressed Foul," meaning, no doubt, dressed fowl.

The owner and operator of a mail boat to a certain small island charges 75 cents to go to this island, and when asked for round trip rate replies party can come back the same day for no additional charge! Chambers of commerce, tourist "floaters" and Interstate Commerce Commission, please note. This man has a Buick automobile engine in this launch and cools it with sea water and for transmission has a special "hook-up."

Several French *pensions*, or boarding houses, in a large Maine city feed patrons for 20 cents straight, each meal, and set most of the grub right before you, at that, to help yourself. At least they did a year ago. Everything is neat and clean. The bread is already sliced and stacked high on a plate, with a family-sized pitcher of drinking water near by. Buy a meal ticket, and it's cheaper yet.

An estimable but humble woman on one island asked me what had been done to a man who "fit" with another man with axes. It seems the other man lost the decision! I was much amused, also, inasmuch as the guilty party had been locked up for nearly a year.

And so it goes. Don't believe it when anyone tells you there's nothing new under the sun.

Cheerfully yours,

T. J. HARDY, JR.,
Bangor, Me.

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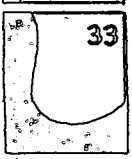

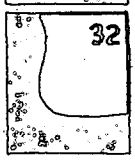

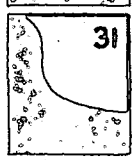

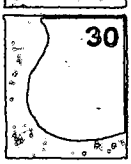

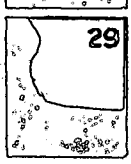

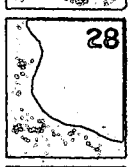

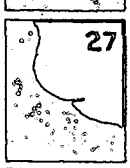

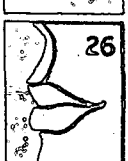

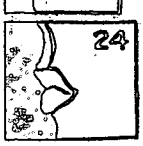

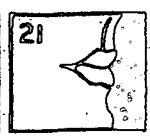

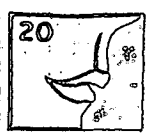

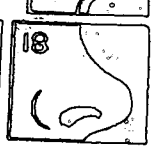

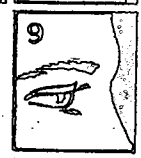

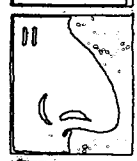

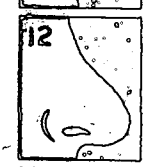

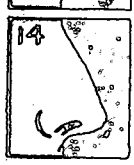

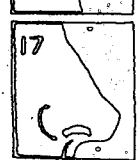

Your Face Reveals Your Character

Let William E. Benton, well known physiognomist, analyze your character from your face. Fill out the coupon at the bottom of the page, and mail it to Mr. Benton. If you have a photograph of yourself, preferably showing three-quarters face, send that too. Mr. Benton will then be able to tell you even more about yourself.

He will tell you what your features reveal of your character. You may have qualities and talents that you don't suspect. You may be following the wrong occupation. You may be in love with the wrong person. You can send in a coupon for anyone you wish, with a photograph if you have one, and Mr. Benton will analyze that face for you. Learn about your own character or learn about the character of your friends. Enclose one dime *with each coupon* to cover mailing and handling costs.

HOW TO USE THE CHART AND COUPON

On the border of this page find the forehead—the eyes—the nose—the lips—the chin—which resemble most nearly the features of the face you want analyzed. In the coupon below draw a circle around the same numbers. Send a coupon and a dime for every analysis.

If you send a photograph remember that only unmounted photographs less than three by five inches in size can be returned.

This coupon is good for one analysis. Expires November 24, 1934.

MR. WILLIAM E. BENTON,
DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY,
280 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

I've filled out the chart of the features I want analyzed and enclose ten cents. Please write me what character this face reveals.

Forehead	Eyes	Nose	Lips	Chin
1 2 3	7 8	11 12 13	19 20 21	27 28 29
4 5 6	9 10	14 15 16	22 23 24	30 31 32
		17 18	25 26	33

Name _____

Address _____

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11-10-34

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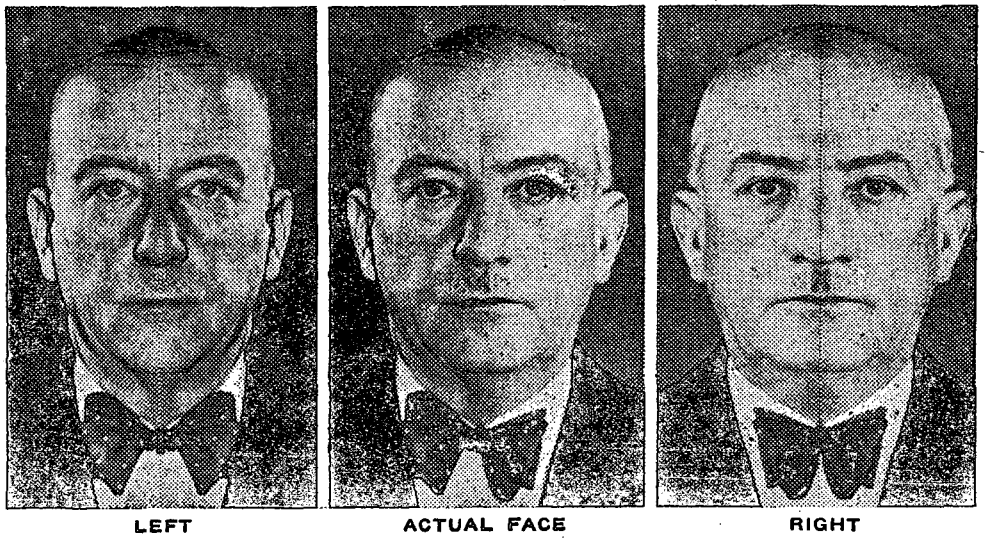
The Soldier's Face of O'Ryan

By WILLIAM E. BENTON



LEFT
or Subconscious Side

ACTUAL FACE

RIGHT
or Conscious Side

THE face of Major-General John O'Ryan is that of the typical soldier. The most significant feature is the eyes. They show the whites below the iris, and this, as I have so often said, indicates cruelty. The ruthlessness which carries out a plan undeterred by the suffering which it may cause others is not necessarily an anti-social trait. If you wish to learn to read character from the face you must never attach too much importance to any one feature, and at the same time never refuse to admit that a certain trait exists. Here is a man who will handle a situation without gloves. Given a choice between a compromise and a fight, he prefers to fight.

Look next at the nose, particularly on the right or conscious side. The wings of the nostrils are not pronounced. A nose of this shape indicates the investigator. A man of this type wants the facts, whether they are pleasant or not. The eyebrows are very different when this face is analyzed with the Duality Mirror, and the greater the differences between the sides, the greater the ability of the person you are analyzing. It is the mark of the leader. When you see a face like this you can be sure you are looking at a man who will be at or near the top in whatever he undertakes.

The right or conscious side of the face as a whole reveals the lover of discipline. Notice and remember the set of the ear, the shape of the back jaw, the narrow, pointed chin. Do not expect a man of this type to agree readily with new and startling ideas. He believes in hard work and self-control, not miracles. His sense of orderliness is very strong. On the right side the brows indicate a feeling for form, for mechanics.

The left or subconscious side of this strong and determined face shows intelligence. Notice how it differs from the right side, which obeys orders. The left side is typical of a man who lays down rules for others to follow. It is to the left side of the face that the greater attention should be paid in reading character from the features, and it is the left side of General O'Ryan's face that reveals the traits which have made him prominent in two different but closely allied lines of work: the army and the police.

Next Week—President Franklin D. Roosevelt

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Solving Cipher Secrets

A cipher is secret writing. The way to solve ciphers is to experiment with substitute letters until real words begin to appear. In solving, notice the frequency of certain letters. For instance, the letters e, t, a, o, n, i, *are the most used in our language. So if the puzzle maker has used* X *to represent* e, X *will probably appear very frequently. Combinations of letters will also give you clews. Thus, the affixes* -ing, -ion, -ally *are frequent. Read the helpful hints at the beginning of this department each week. The first cryptogram each week is the easiest.*

M. E. OHAVER

THIS week's special, No. X-7 by Peter Campbell, is exactly like our regular cryptograms except that divisions between words are not shown in the cipher, the grouping by sixes being merely an arbitrary arrangement. Answers to this cipher will not be credited in our Solvers' Club, but let us know what luck you have with it! The solution will be given in two weeks.

No. X-7. By Peter Campbell.

BXTNFK PXSRVB KEOATR
AVVSPA VGLZZA EUTFGA
HVAKDB XTNFKP XSNGLB
RAFGKZ VGLVFK XTBKEF
SLEVRS ETFGXL YYLEPV
FKXLAV KDVHBG RAVVSP
AVSEZF GALXVK YHFLKE

Low-frequency letters provided entry in last week's Inner Circle No. 264, the pangrammatic message by Romeo. MFSYAUT (frequencies 1-7-5-4-2-5-2) identified itself as *quickly*—the antepenultimate use (in groups 5 and 14) of symbol S indicating *i*, and thus suggesting *qu* for MF, low-frequency components of the digraph YA favoring *ck*, and finality marking symbol T as *y*.

Using this word as a lever, it was easy to pry out UFBASDE (*lu-ki--*) as *lurking*. This, noting the repeated L, would lead to XLBKFEL (*--r-ug-*) as *through*. And so to UNXLPU (*l-th-l*), *lethal;* EFDRKPX (*gun-oat*), *gunboat;* RKHR (*bo-b*) and VFRHNBENV (*-ub-erge-*), *bomb* and *submerges;* etc. Second-position *x* in *explosive* was another vulnerable spot in this message.

Now for a few clews to this week's puzzles! The subtraction E — W = E will give the value of W in the cryptic division by R. A. H. Follow up with A × B = W. The 10-letter key word is numbered from *0* up to *9*. In Joubert's 128-letter message symbol B occurs 47 times, and symbol L occurs 25 times! Comparison of BL, BLLB, and BLB should get you started.

In Vedette's crypt the one-letter word X and the ending -'L will check with the two-letter word XL. Next, compare QXL, JTTO, and EQT, and then try for the long second word. The four-letter word OUBA and the ending -BOAU in Jove's contribution have the same letters. Compare these with OU-, OB, and OFU'B. Word 8 will then drop into place; and so on.

Patterns offer some interesting possibilities in Yesrik's construction! Note the frequency and finality of symbols S and P in connection with group 7. Find your own clews in O. B. Eezee's Inner Circle cipher! A solution of the latter and the answers to Nos. 265-70 will be given next week. The asterisks in cryptograms indicate capitalized words.

No. 265—Cryptic Division. By R. A. H.

KCA)EWIHEB(EBS
TBWE

BHCE
ETKW

CSEB
CKKE

AH

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No. 266—Nice Baby. By Joubert.

MY G *ALBBRUBLB BIBLE BGIOAB G *ALBBRUBLB BLB BL BLLB RER BAR BLB KLIZN BLBBRE, LIOAB BAR BIBLE ORB ALB MY BAR *ALBBRUBLB BLB ALLB GUN BLLB GB BAR *ALBBRUBLB BIBLE?

No. 267—Quite a Stir. By Vedette.

VSPPNB, JXEESTNTOETZ *XSYXEKXD, OPA JTROV FERSRDTZ XL X UTZTKXS HKRLPO, QXL XSKTXZB JTTO YXSSTZ EQT "*XNTKRYXO *ZTGRS'L *RLSXOZ."

No. 268—Provoking Problems. By Jove.

FACIOUS POETRY FRPYRBF OFU'B RDFG—OB YRHJOYRF OUBRUFOIR PAUPRUBYDBOAU. BTAFR *OUURY *POY-PCRF FAKRBOKRF BRDFR KR OUBA PYGOUS AJB, "LDKUDBOAU!"

No. 269—Unmusical Moment. By Yesrik.

*LXTRSPDXS GUOB YEUAAP PHSSYAQ, YNEUAAP FXA-YUYXGSP, ESVSUOSP FQEUBG RKKSEP. LSBARXP PXUYRE ZSVRFSP FBGGSTSG, VRFFUYP PXUVUGS.

No. 270—Fun at the Factory. By O. B. Eezee.

MUDPUDCLEKOR, YEODCLD *MUDUYZUD MUDDLER, YZRMFUEBLY, GEUHX UGKOP RUXNKD PFLA MUD MUD; ELROXP, WUZX. DLHR FLUYXZDLE HEZPLR: "MUDDLY MUDDLER MUDDLY—UXRK WOBBLY!"

LAST WEEK'S ANSWERS

259—Key: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
D I S C O U R A G E

260—On Hallowe'en, great owls and bats, and funny-looking old black cats, are out to frighten girls and boys, who know not how to stop their noise!

261—DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY is packed full of thrilling fiction, facts, and features—including this fine cipher department!

262—Coronado, Spanish explorer, sought the golden treasure of the "Seven Cities of Cibola" in Colorado, but found only misfortune.

263—Unsubduable murmur echoes through canyon like susurration of muted saxaphone. Musing poet attempts subtile verse redolent with *nuance* of natural charm.

264—Gunboat submerges deep-sea bomb. Lurking espionage craft perceives manœuvre through haze, escapes lethal explosive, quickly journeys homeward.

Enroll in our Cipher Solvers' Club for November by sending us your answers to one or more of this week's puzzles! Address: M. E. Ohaver, DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY, 280 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

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COMING NEXT WEEK!

THE Patent Leather Kid stepped from the car. The pistol of the hold-up man jabbed against his back. He was slated to be the fall-guy in a series of million dollar robberies. He would be arrested, exposed, ridiculed. Yet he dared not resist until—

Only the Patent Leather Kid and Erle Stanley Gardner could have figured the next, the amazing move which left the Kid in possession of a huge star sapphire. That gem was the key to the million dollar jewel robberies and a murder! Once he had it the Kid knew how safes protected by the most modern burglar alarm systems could be opened as though by magic. Read how the Kid solved the riddle of the five ferocious fall-guys, and the cat that yowled when murder was to be done. Don't miss—

The Kid Steals a Star

A Novelette by Erle Stanley Gardner

HORROR haunted that beautiful girl who locked herself in a hotel suite. Her face was veiled. She refused to open her door, to admit any one but the waiter. For a murderer sought her—a killer who had left one girl a headless corpse. The fiend slipped through the locked doors. In darkness his fingers clutched the girl's throat.

"Lovely little head!" whispered a gruesome voice. "Too beautiful to be lost . . . Well, it shan't be . . ."

And in the morning a second headless corpse mocked detectives—until Toby Lane, the reporter whose keen wits could fit a face to those headless bodies, faced the killer in a barricaded room far underground beneath the streets of New York.

Four with One Face

A Novelette by Herman Landon

Also stories by HOWARD McLELLAN, RICHARD HOWELLS WATKINS, MADELEINE SHARPS BUCHANAN, TOM ROAN and others, and another installment of FRED MacISAAC'S great serial!

DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY—November 17 issue (out November 7)

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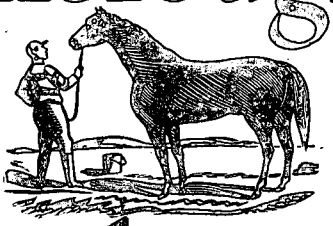
CREAM OF KENTUCKY

100 proof straight whiskey..*first* choice in Kentucky...home of **beautiful women, thoroughbred horses**  **and fine whiskey**

A *Schenley* MARK OF MERIT PRODUCT—PRICED LOW

MADE IN U. S. A.

Copr., 1934, Schenley Distributors, Inc.

FOR A REALLY FINE GIN • TRY SILVER WEDDING GIN

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Here are a few DON'TS about laxatives!

Don't take a laxative that is too strong—that shocks the system—that weakens you!

Don't take a laxative that is offered as a cure-all—a treatment for a thousand ills!

Don't take a laxative where you have to keep on increasing the dose to get results!

TAKE EX-LAX—
THE LAXATIVE THAT DOES NOT FORM A HABIT

You take Ex-Lax just when you need a laxative—it won't form a habit. You don't have to keep on increasing the dose to get results. Ex-Lax is effective—but it is mild. It acts gently yet thoroughly. It works over-night without over-action.

Children like to take Ex-Lax because they love its delicious chocolate flavor. Grown-ups, too, prefer to take Ex-Lax because they have found it to be thoroughly effective—without the disagreeable after-effects of harsh, nasty-tasting laxatives.

For 28 years, Ex-Lax has had the confidence of doctors, nurses, druggists and the general public alike, because it is everything a laxative should be.

Over 50,000 druggists sell Ex-Lax—in 10c and 25c boxes.

WATCH OUT FOR IMITATIONS!

Ex-Lax has stood the test of time. It has been America's favorite laxative for 28 years. Insist on genuine Ex-Lax—spelled E-X-L-A-X—to make sure of getting Ex-Lax results.

Keep "regular" with

EX-LAX

THE CHOCOLATED LAXATIVE

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